

College

Composition and Communication

THE OFFICIAL BULLETIN OF THE CONFERENCE ON
COLLEGE COMPOSITION AND COMMUNICATION

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Conference on College Composition and Communication

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Improving the Status of the Composition Teacher¹

EDWARD J. SPARLING
PRESIDENT, ROOSEVELT UNIVERSITY

It is a little difficult to give constructive suggestions on improving the status of the composition teacher when I would have to agree with Roosevelt University's professor of English, Hermann Bowersox, that there really should not be composition teachers as such—that every faculty member, regardless of department, should require written work and be as much concerned with expression in marking student papers as with thought, because clear expression is evidence of clear thinking.

Those of us in higher education who have the responsibility of evaluating the sum total of our educational curricula, must spend much time on the basic goals of education. I would abolish composition teachers not because composition is not important in this curriculum, but because it is perhaps the most important overall skill to be sought in educational training. Most of the values of education center upon learning to think clearly and to communicate thoughts to one's fellows. If a man is to be effective as a citizen and as a worker in any field, he must be able to write and to speak so as to be comprehensible.

I have a friend who teaches government in one of our Eastern universities. He asked a leader in our State Department what he considered the most important single thing for a student to learn from a course in government. The immediate answer was, "Have him learn to write well." With this admonition in mind the professor gave his classes one composition a week on some specific area of interest in government and carefully annotated the written work to help

the student think and write more clearly and effectively. The students rebelled at first, but gradually found stimulation and growth in the necessary discipline. At the end of the year this particular professor's students scored 20% higher in a comprehensive test given to five classes in government taught by different teachers. This was no accident. Hard work on the part of the professor and the student toward greater clarity of expression produced greater clarity of thinking, permitting a more orderly and comprehensive accumulation of knowledge.

Colleges are constantly decrying the entering students' lack of mastery of basic techniques of composition when they arrive at the university. This situation should be remedied before the student qualifies for a Bachelor's degree. No one should be able to say of a college graduate, "I know what he said, but I don't know what he means!" I would even go so far as to say that no student should pass a course, regardless of the subject matter involved, if he is not able to write a lucid, well-organized paper.

At present there are many problems keeping our universities from carrying out a comprehensive all-college program such as I suggested in my opening statements. The average classes are far too large for much written work or for annotating the little which is required. Many teachers, even if they had time to do so, would refuse to correct faults of expression, regarding this irrelevant to the teaching of subject matter such as history, science, or government. Many a professor is indifferent to the quality of student expression because he has never related this to the thinking process itself.

¹A paper read in the Second General Session, Conference on College Composition and Communication, March 22, 1957, Hotel Morrison, Chicago.

It may be also that he himself has never learned the art of clear expression. It takes only a superficial perusal of the ordinary textbook to suggest this. Many professors of today, highly trained in their specialized fields though they are, were heirs to the very lacks in writing education of which we now speak. If a university were able to carry out the ideal program, of having every teacher a composition teacher regardless of subject matter taught, all teachers would become more competent in their own fields and the values of a liberal education would be extended to all departments of the university. But this we shall have to leave to the future.

The variety and complexity of the problems which keep universities from doing away with composition teachers as a whole seem insurmountable for the moment, and perhaps it is just as well, for no college president would want to lose one of you! Because of the serious deficiency in our educational system in meeting our professed objectives in this field, you, the composition and communication teachers together with the curriculum planning committees and the administrators, must do some coordinated thinking and acting. To begin with, we must examine the whole area of English composition as to need and quality of instruction and to understand why such a title as you have given me, "Improving the Status of the Composition Teacher," should require our attention.

As a matter of first consideration we must examine the need. If the freshman college student had been trained from the early grades in composition by the coordinated effort of all teachers, he would arrive at the university level having already acquired at least the basic techniques of composition. As you know, this is not the case. Not long ago President Griswold of Yale complained that were he to have held his students in history to what he considered an adequate

standard of expression, not more than half of them would have passed the courses. If Yale students are deficient in the art of composition, what are the students of institutions with less rigorous standards of admission? As professors of English you know more than anyone else how inadequate is the writing skill of the average student. At every point in the total process of composition his deficiencies in being able to decide upon a topic, to write intelligibly, to proof-read the final draft, make him not only incompetent for the job at hand, but damage his ability to handle his other university courses. In later life they diminish his stature as an educated man.

With increasing numbers of students seeking admission to college, our problems and the need for improved teaching in this field increase in proportion. Even though entrance requirements may be advanced in some institutions, the basic difficulty remains. And even though our entering freshmen may come to us better prepared and more capable of swift advancement, they still will need training in writing and clear thinking.

This need in the training of writing is recognized not only by college presidents and faculties and by members of our State Department, but by almost every leader in business and industry with whom I discuss educational standards and university objectives. This need then would seem to make the freshman English course indispensable. Yet, paradoxically, in most universities it is taught under conditions that almost assure bad instruction and a minimum of learning.

Here we come to the second point of examination—where are we in the process of fulfilling that need? The freshman English teacher in a large university is likely to be either a part-time instructor working for his Ph.D. at that university, or a full-time instructor who is working for his Ph.D. at some other institution or who has recently taken his

degree and is trying to write critical or scholarly articles for publication. He may have anywhere from 100 to 150 papers to read and annotate each week, in addition to conducting his classes, holding conferences with his students, and attending staff meetings. For all this labor he is paid the lowest possible salary (in a profession where incomes are low by comparison with those of organized labor and of business and the professions), and at the end of three or four years he is dismissed to make room for another who is waiting to take his place. He then gets another job of the same kind elsewhere while he completes his dissertation or writes more articles. If he has been sufficiently industrious and fortunate, he finds a position that carries with it the possibility of promotion and tenure. Thus it happens that in most large universities freshman English is taught by inexperienced or slightly experienced instructors who know that time spent in teaching is time taken away from what will advance their professional careers—the completion of a dissertation and the publication of articles. Those who fail to advance continue to teach freshman English; those who succeed may, in certain institutions, never be required to teach the course again. Such a system suggests that to get ahead the ambitious teacher of freshman English ought to distribute his time and energy in ways other than giving it to the teaching of his classes! The consequence of having freshman English taught by the inexperienced and of rewarding them, not for doing the job well, but for doing something else, is in general bad teaching and the reason why today we are concerned with the improvement of the status of the composition teacher.

Such teaching conditions—and they are by no means confined to freshman English—constitute, it seems to me, a severe indictment of certain aspects of American education. In the first place,

they reveal something of the shortsighted financial policies of American institutions of higher learning. These institutions have, for many years, paid their non-professional staff considerably less than business firms do for comparable work, and they have, on occasion, been unbending in resisting demands for urgently needed wage increases. The low status of the freshman English teacher—and of teachers in other elementary courses—is due in part to these misguided financial policies. The universities find it cheaper to discharge an instructor and replace him with a new one than to retain him and raise his salary above the subsistence level. The financial gain resulting from such a policy seems more important to the university than the building of an adequate course.

In saying this, I do not wish to minimize the severe financial problems faced by all American colleges and universities, but I do question the wisdom of attempting to relieve some of these financial problems by entrusting an essential part of its educational program to underpaid, inexperienced, expendable instructors. If a university can raise money for fine buildings, enormous stadia, endowed professorships, and various research projects, it should also be able to raise money to maintain junior-level teachers in something like a state of dignified employment and maintain their junior college classes at something like the level of effectiveness of the senior college classes. Since some institutions of learning, not all of them wealthy, give their junior-level teachers both status and salary commensurate with their experience and ability and treat their freshman classes as an integral part of the college program, it would seem that financial difficulties do not by themselves constitute an adequate explanation for the way universities generally treat the freshman English course and its instructor.

Perhaps a more adequate explanation is that many universities are comparatively indifferent to the kind of instruction offered on the junior college level because their sights are set on the senior college and on the graduate and professional schools. Most universities, I am sure, would deny this. But what other conclusion can we come to when they persist in offering freshman English and other beginning courses under conditions that would almost certainly foster inadequate teaching? It is not enough to make speeches about the necessity of competence in the handling of language and to deplore the inability of the average student to express himself in language. To be adequate in meeting these indicated needs, a university must not entrust its basic courses in language to the least qualified teachers, pay them only a subsistence wage, and then discharge them about the time they are beginning to learn how to do their job well.

If this analysis seems harsh it is possible to cite exceptions. There are, of course, good teachers of English composition and there are institutions which recognize these problems and are striving to correct the existing evils. However, that the conditions mentioned exist in the majority of the institutions of higher learning is indicated by the very title of the symposium today.

We have discussed the need and the existing conditions which prevent meeting the need adequately. Before anything by way of remedy can be started, the universities must first face the situation of the freshman English teacher squarely, recognize it for what it is—cheap labor turning out inferior products—and refuse to take refuge behind the rationalization of financial insufficiency. The critical need must force universities into constructive thinking and action, into facing up to their responsibilities to the student, to the freshman English teacher and to the need of the future.

At this point we come to the most difficult assignment of all. To see what needs to be done, to see where conditions fall short of meeting this need—this is comparatively easy. But to work constructively toward correcting existing inadequacies and meeting the need within the framework of where we are and what we can do about it—this calls for some blood, sweat, and tears!

I have eight points to suggest:

I. If this whole field of English composition and expression is one of the most important areas of concern for the institutions of higher learning, not only because it helps a student think clearly but because it also affects every avenue of his life, our first job is to look for the most experienced and competent teaching staff obtainable, being prepared to pay the necessary adequate salaries. Obtaining better, well-paid teachers I think is the first step in improving the status of English composition teachers.

II. Since most high school graduates do not come to college with anything like the bare essentials in English grammar or basic techniques of composition, much elementary remedial work must be done. This has sometimes been resented by the professors and perhaps has been one of the causes for the attitude of downgrading the status of the English composition teacher. Actually this need should be a challenge and we should look at it as an opportunity to develop our versatility in meeting the total English needs of the student. A student should in the early days of college become skillful in the complicated process of formulating subject matter, in discovering or devising material relevant to that subject, in adapting that material so it becomes intelligible and meaningful. Such training, while taxing for student and professor alike, would demand and develop one of the most challenging courses in the university and should become one of the most rewarding. To

teach such a course would require many assistants. And here we come to my second suggestion for improvement. These assistants or teaching fellows should be most carefully selected from graduate programs designed to prepare students for this type of work. Only graduate students of superior ability and training should be chosen.

III. All senior members of the English department should teach freshman English. The well-chosen assistants could be used in a variety of ways to help carry the load. The assistants could be given some of the upper-level classes to teach, thus relieving the work load of the senior members. A literature class above the freshman level might seem like manna from Heaven to many a freshman English instructor and would certainly raise his morale. Senior teachers and well-qualified assistants working together would not only help improve the quality of instruction and thereby better meet the students' needs, but would be a third step toward our goal of raising the status of the English composition teacher.

IV. Teachers of English composition should be available for guidance to the rest of the teaching faculty. The entire university family should work toward a broader concept of the inter-relatedness of clear thinking, writing competence, and total adequacy. Plans should be drawn to involve all professors in working together, not only in referring substandard students to the English department, but toward requiring more written work of the students in all the basic or elementary courses in each department of the university. There could be a correlation between total English competency and all other areas of scholastic endeavor, approaching gradually the ideal of which we spoke earlier.

V. If skill in composition is acquired in large measure by the constant dis-

cipline of writing under the close supervision of competent instructors, it is also facilitated by studying literary masterpieces, not only imaginative works but examples of expository, persuasive, and argumentative prose. Naturally these are not a part of courses in a university not related to the English department. However, if more thought were given to the merit of textbooks not only as to subject matter but as to clarity of expression as well as adequacy in writing technique, some by-product of English competency would result from their reading. The English composition teachers could be a source of assistance in this. Anything which tends to elevate the quality of the product certainly will elevate the status of the English composition teacher and a better grade of textbook would be one step toward this goal.

VI. Smaller classes! Much written work cannot be required in large classes, and written work is essential to our program. The pressure of increased enrollments makes it imperative that we think and plan and work toward this necessary adjunct to increasing the quality of work of the composition teacher with the result of helping to raise his status.

VII. All assistants in all departments should meet the standards of the English department in order to be competent in marking papers. Some method should be devised for evaluating this competency. The composition teacher has a role to perform in this area.

VIII. Finally, since the main purpose of a college education is to help a student think clearly and express himself competently, the training in composition should continue throughout the four years of college. This would necessitate some sort of coordinated program in which the English composition teacher would play a major role.

To summarize, these are my eight suggestions:

1. The selection of the most competent teachers.
2. Improved selection of graduate assistants.
3. Senior members of the English department teaching freshman English.
4. English composition teachers in capacity of guidance to all professors.
5. Improved selection of textbooks.
6. Smaller classes.
7. All assistants in every department to meet English department standards.

8. Continuing training in English competence all four years.

As we review these eight points it is possible to see the reason for the reference to blood, sweat, and tears. Such a program is not easy to put into practice and its implementation is almost staggering to comprehend. But we must make a start. The need is too great to ignore. With such a program I think we would at least be making strides toward both the ideal for our universities and the improvement in the status of composition teachers.

Has English Zero Seen Its Day?

—A Symposium

The theory and practice of English Zero (Rhetoric 100, English A, L, X, Remedial English, etc.) in the last fifteen years across the country have been less stable and uniform, if possible, than the theory and practice of Freshman Composition, itself a model of diversification and impermanence. At any moment one institution could be found just introducing it, reluctantly, while another, as like the first as two college cheers, dropped it. Full credit? no credit? some credit? Full range of grades or nothing higher than a C? What should be taught—grammar drill? paragraph writing? remedial reading? how to study? The same class hours as Freshman Composition? more? less? The most experienced instructors? or the least? None of the basic questions were answered the same way at similar institutions, and even at one institution tentative answers stood unreversed only a few years.

Now, since 1955, the status of English Zero has been challenged by the widely publicized decision of the University of Illinois to abandon it in 1960 (for the announcement see *CCC*, February, 1956, p. 50, and for a summary account see Harris W. Wilson, "Illinois vs. Illiteracy," *CCC*, May, 1956, pp. 70-73). Purdue University will drop the course, for engineers, this fall (see *CCC*, February, 1957, pp. 43-44). Other institutions have acted without public statement. Have these decisions, or the present and predictable demands which enforced them, occasioned a new look at English Zero elsewhere?

Convinced that rapid and drastic action concerning this problematical course is imminent, *College Composition and Communication* believes its readers will welcome the following cross-country survey of present thinking about English Zero. The 44 institutions which very kindly responded (the replies are printed virtually as submitted) for practical if not statistical purposes represent kinds of institutions and parts of the country. A statement will be welcomed for later publication from any institution not here represented which wishes to be heard. An

original intention to classify the responses in some meaningful way was abandoned when their diversification became obvious; they stand in alphabetical order.

Each reader is left to draw his own conclusions, except for two which may be permitted: 1) no institution which has not offered English Zero plans to introduce it, and 2) the potential English Zero freshman who finds college doors gradually closing against him will assuredly enroll somewhere—but where?

University of Alabama

For more than twenty years now the University of Alabama has offered a course in subfreshman English for entering students who are so poorly equipped in the fundamentals of English that they are not prepared to do college work. This non-credit three-hour course has been called variously English X, English Clinic, or, at present, English 03 (Fundamentals of English). The enrollment in the several sections of English 03 is comprised of all entering students whose total sum of scaled score for parts on the Cooperative English Test is below 120. All three parts of this test, consisting of Reading Comprehension, Mechanics of Expression, and Effectiveness of Expression, are administered to the student during his first week at the University.

In 1949 the critical score of 120 or scaled score of 40 was arrived at by cutting off ten percent of the general freshman population. This critical score is still used, and statistics show that the number of students assigned to English 03 is usually approximately ten percent of the total. Today many members of the English Department, seeing that nearly fifteen percent of Alabama's freshmen have scored in the lowest three percent nationally, favor raising this score. Indeed, a recent report of a committee of the study and planning program now in progress at the University recommends several changes in the conduct of the course, such as dis-

continuing it within four years as a daytime course on the campus and establishing it thereafter under sponsorship of the Extension Division. Some members of the committee, it is true, were familiar with the recent Illinois decision, but the subject has long been under study at Alabama.

One feature of the present system at Alabama which has proved valuable is the Committee on Questioned Placements, to which a student placed in 03 and/or his instructor may appeal, by submitting specimens of his Composition for credit. The teacher of English Composition has the corresponding privilege—of submitting the writing of a poorly prepared student, who usually scores from 120 to 135, to the Committee for assignment to 03 in an effort to prevent what the instructor fears will be almost certain failure.

For the sake of the five percent of those students assigned to 03 who are eventually able to correct their deficiencies adequately enough to earn credit for English Composition, the subfreshman course will be continued at Alabama. At the same time, the University, through its membership in the Association of College English Teachers of Alabama, is engaged in a serious effort to help high school teachers and administrators prepare more adequately for college their graduates who become our entering freshmen.

W. W. BOYETT,
O. B. EMERSON,

Arizona State College

Since 1954 a subfreshman course entitled English X has been offered here at Arizona State at Tempe. On the basis of the English Cooperative Test, the lowest ranking students have been assigned to remedial sections, meeting three hours weekly and carrying no credit. The designated number of students for the years '54, '55, and '56 respectively has been approximately 14% of the entering freshman class. It should be noted that the cutting score on the examination has been determined by the extent of available classroom space and personnel. Arizona State also has had a noteworthy increase in enrollment with a consequent increase in the number of English X sections, from seven (7) in 1954 to a predicted fourteen (14) for the academic year beginning 1957. At the present time the classes are limited to twenty students.

The testing division is now in the process of a longitudinal follow-up study of students who took English X in the past years. Several random-sampling studies have been completed and it would appear that the results, though tentative, support a continuation of the current policy of mandatory English X placement.

It seems unethical to resist a slight subjective evaluation as a backstop for the tentative statistical results. Some would say this is placing the cart before the horse. Is it? Many of our colleagues have often remarked that they were both surprised and pleased with the communication abilities of the students who passed English X. Just as significant, our colleagues note the high class-morale exhibited by many of the ex-English X students.

Illogical influences have not prompted any change in status of the program here at Arizona State. Indicative of a

positive approach is the fact that each of those involved in the teaching of these courses has enough self-respect and inner-confidence not to feel his own status threatened by teaching poor students.

Again, we do not feel particularly influenced by another institution. We are influenced, however, by the needs indigenous to our school and community and even more by the particular cultural changes of the English language art in our time.

LEE SHAW

Stephen F. Austin, Texas

In the fall of 1955 Stephen F. Austin State College started English 130, a so-called subfreshman English course. Credit for it applies toward a student's electives only and cannot fulfill requirements in English for graduation. Roughly, about thirty percent of our freshmen take the course; of those, about thirty-five percent fail. We adopted the course on the "rotten apple" theory: it keeps our regular freshman English classes from some contamination. We allow credit for it because we teach it (not that this is a defensible premise) and because, under a peculiar fiscal policy, if it were a non-credit course we might not get paid for teaching it (I don't know whether that's defensible or not either). We think that the concentrated misery of our English 130 classes is preferable to the diffused misery which some students cause when scattered throughout our regular sections.

T. J. KALLSEN

Carnegie Institute of Technology

For a number of years we have required a review course for certain students in two of our colleges. We have set arbitrary enrollment figures: 40 students (two sections) in our College of

Engineering and Science (roughly 10% of the freshmen) and 20 students in our Margaret Morrison Carnegie College (roughly 15%). We do not contemplate any change in this procedure at the moment. Students receive credit for the subfreshman course but must take the normal two semesters in addition.

AUSTIN WRIGHT

Colgate University

Colgate University dropped its non-credit remedial writing course in 1948, substituting a "Writing Lab." This is merely a fancy name for individual conferences any student may arrange with an English Department consultant. The conferences are based almost entirely on papers the student has written for non-English courses, and the "Lab" work usually includes revising or rewriting the papers with some guidance. Instructors inform the Writing Lab consultant about students whose writing is seriously deficient, and we make sure that the student knows that the service is available, but he is not required to attend: we want him to come of his own volition and with a desire to improve. Once he does come, however, he must continue his conferences until we choose to release him. His motivation for coming to the Writing Lab, is no doubt fortified by the fact that in our organized Functional Writing Program (writing done in non-English courses as a function of the learning process) we have obtained fairly general faculty assent to the proposition that the grade given should reflect not merely "content" but the total value of the paper as a communication; if the "English" is unsatisfactory the grade is cut.

Our doctrine is that the responsibility of meeting university requirements rests

chiefly on the student himself, but that if he has been admitted the university has a responsibility to help him overcome his deficiencies.

STRANG LAWSON

Connecticut State Teachers College

Our College has never offered such a course with or without credit and, therefore, the Illinois decision has not had any influence on our plans for our freshman courses.

We have at various times considered offering such a course, but the majority of Department members and our administration have opposed it.

MARY ELIZABETH FOWLER

DePauw University

In response to your inquiry concerning the status of subfreshman English, I would like to report that for at least forty years, if not longer than that, DePauw University has never had such a course; consequently we have been in no way affected by the University of Illinois decision.

Our situation here is similar to that of many other private, church-related colleges in that we have, fortunately, been able to keep our admission standards rather high, with the result that we get a minimum of the type of student for whom the subfreshman course is necessary, as in many of the state universities. All freshmen here must take either two semesters of the four-hour course in Basic Communications, which is a combination of the Freshman Composition course and the freshman speech course, or else two semesters of the three-hour Freshman Composition course itself. This year about one-fourth of the freshman class is in Basic Communications, and three-fourths are in

Freshman Composition, but the percentage in Communications is expected to rise somewhat next year, when a two-hour graduation requirement in speech goes into effect. The students in Basic Communications are not sectioned according to ability, since both writing and speaking ability would have to be considered; but the students in Freshman Composition courses are divided into low, medium, and high sections, with approximately one-quarter of the sections being designated as low, one quarter as high, and one-half as medium. Even so, however, all three types of sections study mostly the same things and have about the same assignments, the difference consisting in the amount of attention given to the mechanics of composition and to the finer points of writing.

ARTHUR W. SHUMAKER

Drake University

We eliminated the lower segment of freshman English several years ago. According to Miller and Dollard, *Social Learning and Imitation*, students learn from better students, so that I believe (from my experience too) that segregating the poor students is a guarantee that they will not learn, for the teacher is too remote from them to learn from him. We rather let superior students, after English I, pass on to sophomore courses. Personally I find poor students profit immensely from copying good writing one half-hour a day for three or four weeks. It trains the muscles and often works wonders.

THOMAS F. DUNN

Duke University

For over ten years Duke University has offered English L, a full-credit,

three-hour course as a third semester of English composition required of low-ranking entering freshmen. Those freshmen who fall below the 20th percentile (national norms) on the ACE Psychological Test: Linguistic portion, the Cooperative English Test: Mechanics of Expression and Reading, are ranked according to a formula weighting Linguistic 1, Reading 1, and Mechanics of Expression 2. The three or four sections provided (20 students each) are then filled from the bottom of this list up, the last ten or so line cases being chosen with additional weight being given to Mechanics of Expression. Of the sixty or eighty freshmen enrolled in English L, approximately 8 percent of the total men and women entering, fewer than 10 percent are women. Provision is made during the first three weeks of the semester for transfer in and out of L.

The action taken by the University of Illinois moved us to reconsider the status of English L. A study was made of the academic survival of L students, 1946-56: roughly 46 percent had dropped from college by the end of the 4th semester, 26 percent graduated after 8 semesters. Continuing study will attempt to identify entering freshmen who are good enough risks to merit the cost and time of English L instruction. Meanwhile, on the strength of Admission Office reports of the improving quality of entering freshmen, we have reduced the number of L sections from four to three, and we now assume that they may safely be reduced out of existence. Two additional factors influence thinking here on English L: a stated policy of not increasing admissions, come what may, and a Junior English examination as a requirement of graduation.

F. E. BOWMAN

Emory University

Emory has never offered a subfreshman course, and so the questions as put in the request for information do not apply to our situation directly. They are relevant, however, in a sense.

At about the time the Illinois decision was first publicized, we had already taken a similar position toward that part of the standard freshman course which dealt with subject matter which we consider properly the responsibility of the secondary school. From the 1920's (and perhaps earlier) until the fall of 1953, the standard freshman course, taken by all freshmen except a few gifted ones who were exempted, included about three weeks (five hours a week) of instruction in grammar and about two weeks in punctuation and mechanics. In 1953 we reduced this formal instruction drastically. On the first day we gave each student a diagnostic test on grammar and punctuation and then spent three to five days explaining all of the answers. Then we told the students that they were to keep the tests and study them independently, (each item on the test was keyed to the appropriate section in two different handbooks) for similar material would appear on the final examination of the course. With the time thus saved, we were able to put more stress on what we consider proper subject matter for college-level instruction. In the fall of 1956, we abandon even the diagnostic test and began with the reading and discussion of essays and writing of papers about them. It is too early to tell, but we are beginning to wonder if we have not stepped up the pace too much. Some members of the department are seriously considering the advisability of putting back into the course some of the high school content which we have dropped.

CARLTON NUNAN

University of Florida

I believe that the Illinois decision—it being so dramatically publicized—has induced reconsideration of subfreshman English in many schools; although I believe similar conditions have independently urged reconsideration in many other places.

We have not offered subfreshman English since 1935; so we are not a little puzzled by all the "to-do" about the action at Illinois.

Now that Illinois is not to offer subfreshman English, what will happen (at Illinois, I mean)? Will the schools cram their candidates on what used to be covered in such a course? If so, what will be the effect on the high school English program? Or will freshman English at Illinois be forced to lower standards of achievement? (I mean, will *the* freshman English course be subfreshman English?)

I am dead set against subfreshman English—always have hated the ridiculous idea. We have to take what the high schools send us, and begin to build there. (Why is that measly little content of subfreshman English so crucial? There's lots to be known about our language and literature above that.) So in the final analysis, the problem is the old one—articulation of the high school and college curricula.

J. E. CONGLETON

Florida State University

The much-publicized fact that the University of Illinois has recently been putting a larger proportion of its entering freshmen into remedial English than it did ten or twenty or thirty years ago may be explained by a variety of hypotheses. The information appearing in the press has not been complete enough to indicate which hypothesis is more

nearly true. The most obvious possibility is that the judges have simply raised their standards. Or perhaps the fact that a larger proportion of high school students now go to college may produce a slight drop in the caliber of the average freshman. There seems to be evidence that students drafted for World War II were more literate than those drafted for World War I. If that is true, it would seem to counterbalance any notion that the mass of American students are now poorer in English than they were a generation ago.

The decision of the University of Illinois to bar students who would have been put into remedial English has the effect of making the English test an entrance requirement, and, I gather, one which cannot be counterbalanced by a score on another test, say a mathematics test, however superior the student's achievement may be in the second subject. It will be interesting to see whether the English test can 1) maintain inescapable veto power, and 2) maintain the "passing" standard at the present level.

At the Florida State University the entering freshmen's English achievement has in all probability gone up rather than down recently. At least the scores made on the Cooperative English Test for Mechanics of Expression and Effectiveness of Expression were about ten percentiles higher in September 1956 than scores on the same test in September 1955. This improvement is the result of raising the entrance requirements at the Florida state-supported universities.

The English department at this institution will probably continue remedial sections for some time, even if entrance requirements become stiffer. The decision to continue or abandon the course will not be made on the basis of whether students come up to

a highly subjective notion about "college-caliber work," but rather on the degrees of difference in attainment between a substantial group of the students in the lowest percentiles as compared with those in the middle. So long as the gap seems to us great, we will expect to continue the remedial course.

Our remedial course meets five hours a week for three hours credit. All five hours are handled by the same instructor. Students at the end of the course are graded, and are passed or failed, by the same standard in the regular three-hour three-credit course. Those who pass enter the regular second-semester course. Morale is better than it would be if the students were required to complete a two-hour non-credit course before taking the regular course for his three-hours credit. Furthermore we avoid that thorny debate as to whether the two-hour course would need to carry college credit.

KELLOGG W. HUNT

Georgia Tech

For a number of years the Georgia Tech English Department has offered a 3-hour, non-college-credit, remedial course in English—a review of grammar, usage, sentence structure. The percentage of entering students assigned to English 10 on the basis of scores made on the Georgia Tech Placement Test in English has remained reasonably close to 17%. Even after taking English 10, those students have revealed themselves consistently in difficulty in English courses and, generally, in nearly all other courses. Many are dropped from Tech during the freshman or sophomore years; those who remain in school are likely to spend five or six years here before they are finally graduated, usually in the lower ranks scholastically.

In 1955-1956 the English Department's Committee on Freshman English made a complete analysis of objectives, procedures, content, and accomplishment of our freshman courses in composition, and recommended many changes. Two significant recommendations adopted by the Department are relevant to remedial work. One was the decision to abandon remedial courses in English by the fall of 1960, or sooner if possible. Our action was essentially independent of that of Illinois, though we noted with interest—and concurred in—the time schedule for dropping the course. Second, a necessarily relevant decision was a firmly stated policy on student preparation for and responsibility in the college-credit courses: that the entering student is expected to have control of basic grammar, usage, punctuation, mechanics; that if he does not, it is *his* responsibility to gain control during the first quarter; that if he does not have nor gain control—and consistently displays his inadequacies—he will be failed in the first-quarter course, regardless of the degree of his accomplishment in the actual content of the course.

Two factors external to the English Department will have great bearing on the school's final action on our recommendation to abandon remedial English: 1) Chemistry and drawing laboratory spaces absolutely limit our entering freshman class to 1200, despite the national avalanche of prospective students; 2) Beginning this fall, all students matriculating at Georgia Tech must present Scholastic Aptitude Test scores from the College Entrance Examination Board. The inevitability of an increase in the selectivity of our matriculating group is clear. While we study the correlation of SAT scores and performance at Tech, it is possible that we may wake up one morning a couple

of years from now to discover that we have no students for a remedial section. We devoutly wish for, and work for, this consummation; for an action by the whole school which resolves the problem of the unprepared entering student is far healthier, scholastically, than an action which forces any single department to implement its recommendation to abandon remedial work.

JAMES B. HAMAN

University of Illinois

(See this issue, pp. 95-100.)

Indiana University

Our course is called English W100 (the "W" stands for writing). At present there is no credit for it; the student for the most part "reviews" what he failed to pick up in high school in the way of spelling, punctuation, and basic grammar. At present 21-24 percent of the incoming class enroll in W100. A student qualifies for W100 if he makes below 10 percentile on the English OM or PM test that he takes during his first week on campus.

We have been unhappy with the course for some years (it was begun in 1949). We especially dislike the non-credit part. We should like to see an F carry with it minus two credit points (or a C, plus two credit points), just like any other two-hour course. We shall know some time this semester—though probably not before your deadline of April 1—exactly what we are going to do with W100. By the fall of 1958-59 we should like to start the new plan. One plan that we are discussing now would place the students who make below 15 percentile into special sections of W101 (the first-semester course in the "regular" composition program). The idea is that if they are not thus segregated they will pretty well ruin the regular program.

MERRITT E. LAWLIS

State University of Iowa

The supplementary work in Communication Skills at the State University of Iowa, comparable to what some schools designate as subfreshman work, has been under study for some time. An experiment done during the 1952-53 academic year indicated that the poorer students improved more when they were enrolled in classes with the regular and better students than they did when they were segregated into separate, substandard classes. On the basis of this experiment, the decision was made to have the students in the lowest decile on the entrance tests carry two semester hours of supplementary work concurrently with their enrollment in the first semester (four credit hours) of the regular, two semester Communication Skills course. This is our current practice.

At the present time we are examining (1) the pre-college backgrounds of the poorer students, (2) the grades of these students in Communication Skills and other core courses, (3) the achievement (or lack of achievement) of these students on the final performance tests in Communication Skills, and (4) how long these students continue in college. After this data has been compiled and digested, we may have some recommendation to make about the continuation of our supplementary work and the direction(s) it should take if it is continued.

CARL A. DALLINGER

University of Kansas

The University of Kansas offers English 1a for students whose scores in preliminary tests indicate that they need additional instruction to complete in one semester the work required in the regular English course, English 1. The 1a classes meet five hours a week instead of three, the two extra sessions being devoted to additional practice in writing under supervision. Except for these addi-

tional two hours, English 1a and English 1 are identical, and both carry three credit-hours.

When English 1a was set up, approximately 30% of our freshmen were required to enroll in it. Two years ago the percentage was lowered to 25%, principally because of a slight but consistent improvement in placement test scores over several years. In the fall semester of this 1956-57 year, we had 28 sections of 1a; this spring, since this is the "off" semester for the course, we have only 7.

The University of Kansas is not planning to abandon English 1a. The problems of classroom space and staff may in time force us into changes in the present procedure, possibly even into slight curtailment of 1a; but at present no change is contemplated.

NATALIE CALDERWOOD

University of Kentucky

The remedial course offered by the Department of English at the University of Kentucky, carrying no credit and called English D, has existed for about thirty years with varying degrees of success and under varying methods of instruction. Any entering freshman who scores in the lowest quartile on the basic entrance test is strongly advised to enroll in this course, and approximately 15% of them do so. The most significant change in the course occurred three years ago. At that time the staff, after considerable study and deliberation, defined the remedial course as a course directed at acquainting the student with the type of work given in the subsequent credit course rather than merely reviewing grammar, mechanics, etc. Since the credit course aims primarily at developing reading and writing skills, the remedial course was re-designed in order to give experience in these skills, though at reduced speed and reduced quantity. The

classes read, discuss, and write regularly, turning out about half the quantity demanded in the first part of the credit course. If the students need training in grammar and mechanics, that training is provided both in class and in conference on the basis of individual need. After the student passes through English D, he goes at once to English 1a, the credit course. Follow-up studies of English D graduates over a three-year period show the following results:

Those who received A in English 1a:	None
Those who received B in English 1a:	1-2%
Those who received C in English 1a:	22%
Those who received D in English 1a:	37%
Failures:	38%

These percentages vary from year to year, naturally, and many of the poorly prepared students drop out of the University before the end of their first year. Of the survivors, about 30% make higher grades in English 1b; 44% make the same grade that they earned in English 1a; and 27% make lower grades.

The department has mixed feelings about whether the benefits justify continuing the program. Thus far, however, it has felt that as long as these weak students are allowed to matriculate, there are two reasons for continuing the non-credit course: First, these weak students who take the course fare a bit better in the long run than those who enter the credit course immediately; and, second, adulteration of the credit course is prevented by keeping the weakest students out of it.

MAURICE A. HATCH

University of Maryland

We have offered no subfreshman course since World War II. I understand that for a few years prior to the war and during it, a non-credit course was offered; but with the unprecedented influx of students because of the G. I. bill, the department faced too many complex

administrative problems to continue the program. Actually, I think that one reason it has not been revived in recent years is that most of us have opposed it in principle. Since the experience of Illinois and a number of other schools served to confirm our convictions, we have no intention of reviving it.

At present all our weak students are in regular freshman sections. We are failing approximately twenty percent of our English I students—a figure which in my opinion is not high enough, considering that the same percentage of freshmen have entered the university on a trial basis. In other words, they did not even maintain a C average in high school. These probational students are offered some tutorial service in English by the Dean of Student's Office, but we have no control over this program and have no desire to bring it under our jurisdiction.

JACK BARNES

University of Michigan

The University of Michigan is in the fortunate position of being able to select its students from the top third of graduates from Michigan high schools, and to exercise a similar selectivity with respect to out-of-state students. Accordingly, we have not found it necessary to offer sub-freshman courses in composition, nor have we any intention of doing so. About ten percent of our freshmen are put in special sections on the basis of their proved ability, and I hope that our distinctions can continue to be between the best and the good, rather than between the good and the poor.

WARNER G. RICE

Michigan State University

Generally 8 to 12 percent of the entering class at Michigan State University are required to enroll in the non-credit

Writing Improvement Service. The percentage varies somewhat, depending largely upon staff members available to teach deficient writers. For example, most students come to the Service because they have made scores under 30% on the objective composition test taken during Orientation Week. Can it be said that a student scoring 31% is not in need of help? The reply must be that the institution does not have time or money or staff to help him. Recently a higher percentage of students has fallen into the lowest group, but fewer have been enrolled, partly because class size has been limited, for obvious reasons, to twenty.

From such a description, it is easy to understand why Michigan State has examined the Illinois decision with great interest. Before we reach a conclusion, however, the causes for unsatisfactory writing performance must be considered.

Students may be poor writers for these reasons: 1) they lack capacity, 2) they lack adequate preparation, 3) they lack motivation, 4) they have regressed in writing ability because they have been out of school for extended periods, and/or 5) they suffer from debilitating emotional disturbances.

Students without capacity undoubtedly present serious problems. Actually, if we may adopt both a term and a concept used by reading specialists, such students are not "retarded writers" at all. They often do about as well as can be expected. We can help them see the need for specificity and directness, for supporting generalizations with concrete details, for reasonable organization. In other words, we can assist them in utilizing their abilities in matters outside the area which they call "grammar." That we can turn them into writers who will succeed in a demanding college program seems unlikely.

Such students could be turned away, or accepted as Illinois suggests, pre-

doomed; a better solution might be to guide them into terminal, non-degree, needs-centered programs which would allow them to advance as far as their abilities would permit.

The question of poor preparation is a puzzling one. If we are to require that public schools do a better job of preparing their students for college, we must assume some responsibility for seeing that better teaching takes place. What can we do here that is not already being done and that is within our power to effect? How can we ensure smaller classes, lighter teaching loads, better-prepared teachers, more writing assignments?

The state of Michigan, like Illinois, could save money and headaches by eliminating subfreshman courses. Inevitably, then, the state must invest more heavily in pre-college institutions, and the university must contribute concrete ideas to bettering the total school situation.

Lack of motivation to do better writing reflects upon our colleagues and our society. If the student is not convinced that competent writing is a considerable asset, we must have failed to demonstrate this truth. Indeed, perhaps it is not a truth at all, although none of us would like to face such a denigrating possibility. At any rate, keeping this poor writer from college may motivate him simply to try harder to overcome an obstacle; it surely cannot do more to show him the intrinsic worth of effective writing itself.

The Illinois plan, if we understand its implications properly, could block from college entrance the returning serviceman and the earnest youth who has spent several years in a factory to secure funds for his college career. At any rate, these students would be forced to flounder along as best they could. At Michigan State we believe special provisions for such students must be made. Many of us recall that we ourselves

were not at our scholarly best when we were released from the armed forces after one or another of the recent conflagrations.

The emotionally disturbed youth whose disturbance reflects itself upon his compositions is likely to receive no assistance at all unless he does come to college . . . and stays for awhile. Since we know that about 40% more poor writers demonstrate emotional difficulty than do "normal" writers, we cannot pass over this group lightly. Refusing college admission could not help to make such students emotionally more secure.

In summation, the Illinois proposal tempts us, but it does not convince us. It seems to remove symptoms but to give insufficient attention to causes of writing maladies. Our task would be easier, indeed, if we could devote ourselves only to better students. Nevertheless, we cannot see that the Illinois plan would accomplish a larger end: improvement of the writing proficiency of great numbers of young Americans.

We should like to suggest, as alternatives, a) creation of non-degree programs for many students, b) an increased emphasis upon writing in all courses which would encourage students toward improved performance, c) abolition of compulsory subfreshman courses and reliance upon students voluntarily enrolling or otherwise assuming responsibility for their own progress, and d) establishment of a series of checks on performance which would allow students to demonstrate that through maturation, their own efforts, or the will of God, they had become reasonably proficient writers.

Like Illinois, we would insist that no student be graduated from our institution who had not demonstrated his ability to use written English acceptably.

ROBERT L. WRIGHT

University of Minnesota

The University of Minnesota (Minneapolis) has, and has had since 1906, a subfreshman composition course; and—since the course carries no credit, is no expense to the university (students pay an extra fee, of eighteen dollars), does the students who take it some good, and sometimes provides employment for good teachers who would not otherwise have any—the university is not presently considering abandoning it.

The course is a three-hour, one-quarter course taken by from 9 to 18 percent of freshmen entering the College of Science, Literature, and the Arts; the College of Education; the Institute of Technology; and other, more specialized colleges and programs. (Incidentally, since these colleges all have entrance requirements other than high school graduation, and since applicants who fail to meet them go into General College, which has a two-year terminal program, this course does not get the poorest qualified freshmen on campus.) The formula that places some freshmen into this course has four factors variously weighted: (1) high school rank, and scores on (2) the American Council on Education Psychological Examination, (3) the Co-operative English Test, and (4) an impromptu theme. Fluctuations in the number of freshmen taking the course are due not only to fluctuations in the quality of freshmen but also to changes in the height of the threshold that admits students to the regular freshman English courses; and no trends in the quality of freshmen are apparent. The percent of students failing the course has ranged as high as 33 in recent years; but, because of improvement in the content of the course and in the quality of instruction and because of a change in the final examination, the percent is now under 10. Since the placement formula described is fallible, students who do superior work in the course (sometimes as high

as 15 percent) are given credit for, and excused from taking, the third quarter of freshman English, provided that they earn grades of at least C in the first two quarters. On the average, students who pass this course (with or without this credit) do slightly better in the first quarter of freshman English than ones who were not required to take the course.

MARTIN STEINMAN, JR.

University of Nevada

The University of Nevada instituted a non-credit remedial course, English A, about ten years ago, placing students in it on the basis of an entrance test, including an impromptu theme, and three weeks of re-checking and re-evaluation. A student must pass it before he can enter regular freshman English at the beginning of the semester. The course is still in existence. This year, 19% of the beginning freshmen entered it. This percentage is roughly the same as the average over the period in which we have used the course. There have been variations, but I think they often have reflected variations in our standard as much as any change in the preparation of students. I think that our tests have shown no significant change in student preparation during the last five years.

Both last year and the year before, the department has considered and has discussed with the administration other plans for meeting the problem of badly prepared students in English. We have considered abandoning the course and letting the student take his chances in the regular freshman program—and the Illinois decision certainly influenced our discussion of this possibility. We have also considered granting credit for the remedial course, placing subfreshman students in a five-hour three-credit beginning semester, providing voluntary or required, credit or non-credit "clinics," or providing other special tutorial help for inadequately prepared students.

After considerable discussion we have decided to retain the non-credit remedial course for the present, as least, as the most feasible way of managing the problem here. Shortage of staff makes supplementary clinics impossible, and various staff members have opposed diverting funds needed badly for other purposes to hiring additional teachers for non-college work. Reasons for retaining some kind of remedial help included both administrative opposition to the sink-or-swim program and such considerations as the difficulty of maintaining standards in the face of an inevitable rise of failures in the regular course, the possible resentment of both students and public at a larger number of failures, and the fact that the state has no other collegiate institution to which badly prepared students might go. Although we feel that the non-credit course is far from an ideal solution for the problem of the inadequately prepared student, we are retaining it for the present as the most suitable compromise between a strict maintenance of collegiate standards (which would involve dropping remedial work and not admitting the unprepared student) and unwarranted expense for an elaborate sub-college remedial program.

ROBERT M. GORRELL

University of New Mexico

During the 1954-55 academic year, the University of New Mexico, unaware at the time of the University of Illinois decision but responding to similar conditions, abandoned a series of experiments with subfreshman courses in composition and began enrolling all entering freshmen, regardless of background or placement test scores, in regular, unsegregated 3-credit-hour sections of English 1. Over a period of years, UNM had tried a non-credit English "A" course for sub-freshmen and a segregated 5-hours-for-

3-credits course in which the two extra hours were devoted to remedial reading. While each of these systems had some merit, the difficulties and expenses overbalanced their advantages.

For the past two years, all remedial work in English has been handled outside the classroom in an English Workshop, staffed by graduate assistants. On the basis of low placement scores in English or at the recommendation of their regular English 1 instructors, freshmen who show marked deficiencies must register for two hours a week of tutorial help in the English Workshop. In these tutorial sections (limited to six students) the graduate assistants work chiefly with the correction of English 1 themes. Weekly progress reports sent to instructors by the tutors may recommend terminating a student's required tutoring either because he has made up his deficiencies or because he is, in the judgment of the tutor, unable or unwilling to make further improvement.

Approximately ten percent of the freshman class are required to take tutoring. Although some drop the requirement along the way, many continue it through both semesters of the freshman year.

The New Mexico English staff feel generally that the present English Workshop program is preferable to the sub-freshman courses tried in the past, but they are nevertheless reconsidering the program for next year. In any event, it is clear that the University of New Mexico must continue to make some provision for subfreshman help. While the abandonment of special courses and the addition of required tutoring has solved many problems and met most responsibilities, the system at UNM will need at least some alteration and perhaps, in view of the establishment at New Mexico of a University College beginning this fall, a total change to meet the needs ahead.

EDWARD LUEDERS

University of North Carolina

We have under consideration the elimination of our remedial English course, but no action has as yet been taken. This reconsideration was not motivated by the action of the University of Illinois but by the adoption of admission tests by the University for the fall of 1957. We estimate that something over half of the present enrollment in English R will be eliminated by these tests. Further, students who are admissible but defective in English preparation will be encouraged to attend the summer session prior to their enrollment in the University and there take the remedial course offered for them. The joint effect should reduce the number of students needing remedial work to such a small figure as to make the continuation of the course in the regular sessions inadvisable.

In the past several years our enrollment in the remedial course represented about 17% of the entering freshman class. There has been a slight but not significant drop in this figure in the last five years. The course carried no credits towards graduation but was considered in determining the student's semester-to-semester academic eligibility. Our experience with the graduates of this course is comparable to that reported from various places—too few of these students went on to graduation to warrant the effort and expense of the course, although our figure is somewhat higher than the figure reported, for instance, by Ken Knickerbocker at Tennessee.

GEORGE F. HORNER

North Carolina State College

For the past ten years North Carolina State College has been offering a non-credit course called "English Refresher." Originally instituted for veterans who felt unsure about their background in grammar and mechanics, it was early adapted to the needs of our entering

freshmen who scored in the lowest three deciles of the American Council Co-operative Test in English—in other words, about thirty percent of the freshman class. Although we feel that the course has been successful in salvaging a considerable number of students, we believe that it has involved much waste motion and that it has tended to keep in college many students who are not college material. In the hope of soon making the placement test score one of the criteria of entrance and of thus being able to raise our entrance standards, we look forward to abandoning the refresher course. Undoubtedly our thinking has been influenced by the Illinois decision, though I am quite certain that we should have arrived at our conclusion independently.

LODWICK HARTLEY

Northwestern University

Northwestern has never offered any kind of subfreshman English course. We do have a departmental tutor whose work with certain poorly-prepared students is done in addition to their regular work in Freshman English. The number of such students has always been small (less than three percent of the Freshman class) and it has diminished during the last two years with the raising of our standards for admission to the University. We do not plan to change this system.

The decision of the University of Illinois interests us because it may have an effect upon the preparation in English which our future students will receive in the local secondary schools.

WALLACE W. DOUGLAS

Ohio University

One-third of our students are placed in our remedial section, English I, each semester. They are selected by a general

placement test (Cooperative English Test). The course must be repeated if the student earns a D or an F. No credit toward graduation is earned, but the grade counts toward grade-point average for any given semester.

The Illinois publicity has given many of us something to think about, but everything is unofficial. Although we would like to discourage ill-prepared students to come here, we are hesitant to mix them in with our regular students and lower the class average.

EDGAR W. WHAN

University of Oklahoma

(See this issue, pp. 100-104.)

Oklahoma A. and M. College

We have been offering a subfreshman course for many years. Until two years ago, it was for practical purposes non-credit, although non-credit status was not specified; that is, most of our curricula did not allow credit for it. Two years ago when our two 3-hour regular freshman composition courses were replaced by one 5-hour course, the subfreshman course was set up on the 5-hour basis also. In effect, it carries 3 hours credit, since students passing it must take an additional 2-hour course not required of students in the regular freshman course.

We sometimes sent as many as 30 to 40 percent of our entering freshmen to the old 3-hour course. Now, however, we assign only 20 to 25 percent to the 5-hour subfreshman course. Recently our freshmen seem to be coming to us a little better prepared; consequently, the percentage assigned to the subfreshman course has declined slightly.

We are not reconsidering the status of the subfreshman course beyond our general efforts to improve our overall program whenever and wherever possible. Certainly we have no expectation of

abandoning it in the near future, although we do deplore the fact that the ill-prepared student is an extra cost in money and effort for the institution in general and the English staff in particular.

The announcement by the University of Illinois startled us somewhat, as it no doubt did other departments; but I doubt that we have been specifically influenced by it up to now. We shall of course be much interested in (1) whether the plan can actually be put into effect in 1960 at that state institution, and (2) news of how it works out after it goes into operation.

CECIL B. WILLIAMS

University of Oregon

The decision of the University of Illinois to cut out subfreshman work has my approval, and I should like to do much the same here. We now have a course called Writing 10 that takes about 18 to 20 percent of our freshmen, most of whom have dropped out of school by the end of the year. The situation here has taken a turn that makes it desirable to postpone any change. This year it was decided by the State Board of Higher Education to limit entrance to the University to those students in high school who had a "C" average. It is expected that this ruling will cut out the lower ten percent of our entering students. If it does, it will affect our Writing 10.

PHILIP W. SOUERS

Pennsylvania State University

The Pennsylvania State University has had English Composition 0 for more than twenty years. The course is required of all students who receive failing scores on Penn State's English Placement Test. The course gives no credit. Classes meet three hours per week for a full semester.

Instruction combines student writing with drill-book exercises. Twenty-five to thirty percent of the students fail during the fall semester and have to repeat one or more times before attaining minimum competence.

To screen incoming freshmen, Penn State uses a 120-item objective test covering vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, and spelling. In general, students placing in the bottom quartile report to English Composition 0, but each college establishes the standard for its own students.

About a year ago the University began a testing and counseling program for the benefit of high school graduates planning to attend college. College prospects are thus able to discover during the summer whether they will be required to enroll in the remedial English course and gain also an estimate of their aptitudes and probability of scholastic success. At present, no graduate of an accredited high school is refused admission because of a poor showing on any of these tests. We hope, of course, that applicants who do quite badly will be steered away.

Our feelings about English Composition 0 are mixed. It is probably the most "worried about" course in the Department. In the fall semester it consumes about one-fourth of our manpower. Those who teach it exhaust their ingenuity in thinking up new ways and means of implanting fifth-grade material in seventeen-year-old minds. Despite our labors and devotion, we realize that a shocking percentage of these students will never see Commencement Day. In fact, a study we recently performed indicates that about sixty-four percent of them leave college before their seventh semester, for one reason or another. We also recognize, however, that the course may "save" many who would otherwise fail; and a small percentage later become fair or even good students in English, and may ultimately graduate with a re-

spectable record. But the overall picture makes us wonder whether we are not misplacing a major effort that should be spent on the superior student.

Will Penn State continue to offer the remedial English course? We simply do not know. We have repeatedly debated the question, and it is entirely possible that next year or some later year the decision will go against retaining it. If the course is justified by student need (and this seems to be the opinion prevailing at present), we can hardly see our way clear to abandon the course while the need remains. We are also strongly opposed to mixing grossly unprepared students with students who are average or better in English. However, if the University should establish the policy of refusing admission to poorly prepared students, the entire problem would be resolved.

We have made every reasonable effort to keep informed of the status of similar courses throughout the country, including the action at Illinois. Any action of ours will certainly take cognizance of actions taken elsewhere. In the final analysis, however, the future of the course will depend upon our appraisal of needs and means on the Penn State campus.

KENNETH W. HOUP

Roosevelt University

Roosevelt University has been offering a non-credit course in composition ("Basic Writing Practice") since the spring of 1948. At present about half the students in the course are there because they have failed the placement examination in English 101 (about 15 to 20% of the entering freshman), and half because they themselves have recognized their need for remedial training or have been recommended to the course because of writing difficulties in advanced courses. There has been no significant change in the percentage of students taking this

course. Though we are not actively contemplating a change in the BWP program, we may soon have to do so because of two conditions: (1) we are raising our entrance requirements next fall, and this change may eliminate from the University many of the students now taking BWP; (2) there is a growing feeling that the University cannot afford to subsidize the education of its least qualified students. I can see no evidence that the recent action of the University of Illinois will have any bearing on any decisions we make concerning the course.

HERMANN C. BOWERSOX

Stanford University

At Stanford we have continuously been considering what is best to do for students who need help in English in addition to that offered in English 1, 2, and 3. Hence, although we applaud the action taken by the University of Illinois, our deliberations have not been influenced by Illinois' decision on Rhetoric 100.

For many years, we required those students who failed our English Placement Test, given to only those admitted to the University and who come to register, to take English A, a two-unit review of grammar and syntax and additional practice in writing a theme a week. Most of the years we gave no credit for the course. But recently, because of the Sixth Army's definition of what constitutes a "normal academic load" for men whose military service is being deferred, we had been giving two-units of credit for English A.

But beginning with September, 1956, we now have a new program. All freshmen must take English 1, 2, and 3, three quarters of English. Those who do not do well on our English Placement Test must also take English R, a non-credit course that meets once a week for two hours. English R is a review of the gram-

mar that the students need as indicated by their tests and also by their weekly themes that they write for the regular English course that they are taking concurrently. Thus the weaker students get five hours of English each week, instead of three. A student stays in English R only so long as his work indicates that he needs the extra help.

When we had English A, about 35-40% of our freshmen had to take the course. This year we are experimenting by assigning only about 20% of this year's freshmen to English R.

We are not considering abandoning our remedial course. Instead, we are always considering ways of strengthening it. Perhaps our circumstances are not similar to those in the state institutions. Because of our competitive admissions, we are able to select quite carefully. We believe that this selective admission probably minimizes our problems.

ALFRED H. GROMMON

Temple University

Temple University does not have a strictly subfreshman composition course, but it does put students who do poorly in the English placement test in a lower-level course called English 1A. This course, which carries the same credits as other composition courses, gives much attention to mechanics and the problems of rather short themes. Students read a novel and a considerable number of essays.

The percentage of students placed in English 1A (rather than in the regular composition course) has been going down steadily. In September 1951, 30 per cent of the incoming freshmen were enrolled in 1A; by September 1955 the number had dropped to 15 per cent, and by September 1956 to 12 per cent.

The reason for the drop is obvious: even though Temple is admitting more students now, it is being more selective

than it was five or six years ago. Students for whom there once would have been room cannot now enroll at Temple. There is every reason, of course, to believe that the number of students who are required to take 1A will decrease still further.

There seems no probability, however, that 1A will be abandoned entirely. Drawing so many of its students from the varied backgrounds of a large city population, Temple is not likely soon to cease to need such a course. On the whole, opinion appears to be that the course has performed its function as well as could be expected.

IRWIN GRIGGS

University of Tennessee

More than twenty years ago the University of Tennessee abandoned the non-credit, subfreshman course in English composition. During the years following this action several plans have been tried for dealing with the student who is inadequately prepared for a college course in English. At first an effort was made to remedy deficiencies in English by assigning the lowest one-third of the entering freshmen to special sections, which emphasized review and class drill on fundamentals while at the same time covering the basic material of the first quarter of the regular freshman course. The means of selection was originally an objective test plus a theme; later the objective test alone was used.

Homogeneous grouping, never a really satisfactory solution to the problem of the unprepared student, was abandoned before the beginning of the 1954-1955 session, principally because of the difficulty of maintaining standards and offering a genuine college course in the special sections. Three plans were considered for taking care of the most poorly prepared students (the lowest ten percent) more effectively: (1) non-credit sections

lasting for one quarter, (2) credit sections with two additional class hours per week, (3) credit sections with additional hours in the Writing Laboratory. The third plan was adopted; and, in slightly varying forms, it has been in use for the last three years.

The Writing Laboratory has been used in three ways as an adjunct to Freshman English. In the fall of 1954 students in the lowest ten percent of the entering class were required to attend the Writing Laboratory for two extra hours per week. They attended general Laboratory sessions which were open also to advanced students with special problems in composition. In 1955 students in the lowest ten percent were required to attend special drill sections for freshmen only. In 1956 all freshmen having difficulties in English were invited but not required to attend special drill sections. Careful study of the results of these experiments has showed that improvement in the achievement of the most poorly prepared students has not been sufficient to justify the extra time and effort on the part of both students and staff. Next year we hope to be able to open the Writing Laboratory to ambitious freshmen with special difficulties, but the plan of giving extra time to the weakest students in the class will not be continued.

On the basis of our experiments in teaching students with inadequate preparation, the English Department at the University of Tennessee has reached a conclusion similar to the decision recently announced by the University of Illinois. We believe that in the years immediately ahead the colleges can best fulfill their responsibility by concentrating upon the education of those students who are prepared to take advantage of the normal opportunities offered by college-level English.

BAIN T. STEWART

Texas A. and M. College

We have a course (no credit) in composition, English 100, that we give to about seven percent of our entering freshmen in the fall semester. For some years we have wanted to abolish the course by having the College refuse to admit those students whose tests indicate that they are not ready for our first regular course in freshman composition. So far our administration has not found a way to reject these deficient students.

We use English 100 for two other groups. Some transfer students and some of our own show up in advanced classes with wretched habits in their writing. The worst of these we send to English 100 and do not allow them in advanced classes until they show improvement in their ability to write. The course is very useful as remedial work for this group. In the spring semester and in one summer term we offer a special section of English 100 for students of foreign birth. The course is very useful for this group.

Our administration is making plans to limit enrollment by rejecting the lowest group of the students who come to us. If these plans materialize, I have high hopes that we shall abolish English 100 for entering freshmen. Probably we shall always keep a few sections of the course for advanced students and students of foreign birth.

S. S. MORGAN

Tulane University

Tulane University does not have a sub-freshman course in composition, nor has it had one within the memory of any present staff member. However, any teacher of any course in the university can withhold credit for that course if he considers the student's writing to be unsatisfactory. Students who have been given a "uw" must receive instruction from a teaching assistant in the English department until he brings his writing

up to college standards. No change in this system is planned. There is no sure way to determine whether the language competence of incoming freshmen has become greater or less in recent years, but the general impression is that standards have fallen off.

When a university finds that a substantial number of its in-coming freshmen require additional training in the use of the language, it must be clear that the standards of the university are too high or that the standards of the preparatory schools are too low. Since few college English teachers anywhere are satisfied with the literacy level of high school graduates, it seems likely that college standards are not too high, but that high school standards have fallen off. The clear-cut and firm action of the University of Illinois should exhibit the situation in such a way as to insure some remedial activity.

Now that the deterioration in student literacy has been exposed so dramatically, perhaps we should examine all that we are doing about two of the r's. Members of college English departments are likely to see their colleagues in Education departments as convenient villains and look no further. As one who has taught in both high school and college, and who has advanced degrees in both Education and English, I have seen that misunderstanding what is properly meant by a "child-centered school" often results in a child-minded school, and that automatic promotion often places students in the senior class who can neither recognize a sentence nor write one.

At the same time, college English departments cannot escape all responsibility. Possibly the high school graduate uses language poorly because his teacher does not know enough about the language to give him better instruction. Possibly the almost exclusive attention to literature in college has made the high school teacher interpret his duties simi-

larly. And, so long as the taxpayers want literacy to be foremost in the English program, but most college teachers want to teach literature exclusively, the college English departments are not likely to be fully successful in their attempts to control the training of lower-level teachers in their subject.

Our colleagues in Education, if (in our view) occasionally misguided, are generally quite earnest and intellectually honest. But they can attack the pedagogical problems in the literacy program only with the theory of language and the information about the English language which members of the English department have supplied. If English departments do not put the results of modern study about language into the stream of instruction, some other agency is likely to. And that agency is, in time, likely to take over the composition/communication course itself. Some invasions of this English prerogative have already been made.

SUMNER IVES

University of Utah

The character of the subfreshman composition course at the University of Utah has been modified during the past five years; the basis of assignment to it was changed during the last two; and, together with other remedial courses, it will probably now be transferred to the Extension Division with costs to be borne by the student. This final change in status may have been influenced by the action of the University of Illinois, but was under consideration before the Illinois decision was announced.

The subfreshman course (English A) was traditionally a non-credit three-hour review of grammar required of freshmen whose entrance examination scores fell below a specified point. Some 30% of the entering class were assigned to it. Two years ago, this number was cut in

half through a change in University policy placing in the remedial course only those freshmen who had *both* scored below the critical point *and* been assigned—on the basis of high school records and other data—to the University's two-year certificate program. Students accepted for the four-year degree program but scoring below the critical point were assigned to a new five-hour three-credit course, English 1a, comparable in all respects except pace with English 1, the regular three-hour course for average freshmen.

In 1956-57 English A was still further reduced (to about 10% of the entering class), by the University's denying admission to applicants with less than a C average in high school who showed deficiencies in two areas tested by the entrance battery. (Such applicants may if they wish take in Extension a course comparable with English A and subsequently present themselves for reexamination.) Now being considered are sweeping changes in the whole certificate program; these will presumably entail the transfer of *all* remedial courses to the Extension Division. Meanwhile, English A has come to emphasize the elements of reading and writing (rather than formal grammar); and, particularly if transferred *in toto* to the Extension Division, will probably be graded on a "pass" and "fail," rather than the current letter, basis.

These adjustments probably mean a substantial proportionate reduction in the number of students ill-prepared in English in regular University classes, and a slight proportionate reduction in the total number of such students in all classes. (The Department will continue to be responsible for the staffing and standards of remedial English in Extension.) And there have been modest gains in student morale, class homogeneity, and instructional effectiveness. The five-hour three-credit English 1a has reduced

failures and repetitions and has kept more students up with their class. As a result, the Department is experimenting with a comparable second-quarter course, English 2a—but with rather negative results thus far. All together, these efforts have perhaps provided an umbrella, but no Ark, come the deluge.

EDWIN R. CLAPP

Valdosta State College, Georgia

The subfreshman course in composition (English 99) at this school is regarded as an essential foundation for incoming students because of the poor instruction in local high schools. Approximately 65% of the freshmen are required to take the course. During recent years, I am informed by faculty of long standing, there have been no significant changes in the percentage. The course carries five semester hours of credit. No consideration has been given to the possibility of changing the status or the content of the course. I am sure that the Illinois decision has had no local effect.

WILLIAM MCENTYRE CALHOUN

University of Washington

Beginning this summer, the remedial English course will be offered only through the divisions of Extension Classes and Correspondence Studies and (possibly) by the University's television station. In all three cases, the fee for the course will be eighteen dollars. It will still be a non-credit course and, as before, will be required of all students who score below the twentieth percentile on the University's English Aptitude Examination. At present the number of such students is between 600 and 700, or about one-fifth of the total freshman class.

Though the proportion of students who require the remedial course has not changed significantly in the past few years, the pressures of rising enrollments

are making it harder and harder to justify giving about one-fifth of the available classroom space in Freshman English—and, more important, a considerable budgetary allotment—to a course that is admittedly not a university's real business. If a student needs the course, it seems proper to ask him to pay for it himself and to take it at a time that does not interfere with the program of regular university courses. What strengthens the logic of this conclusion is the statistical finding that only nineteen percent of the students who take the remedial course in the fall term are still left in school with satisfactory grade-points in the following spring. It is not surprising that the University administration feels it might better give the time and energy of its teaching staff to qualified students.

Unquestionably the action of the University of Illinois in eliminating its remedial program helped force the issue here. The final decision of our administration, however, was not to eliminate the course but to emphasize its non-university character by removing it from the day-school and by charging students what amounts to extra tuition for taking it. Such action, it is believed, will have an even more salutary effect on high school instruction than the Illinois plan, for it will keep the fact of the remedial student a live and public issue instead of, in effect, denying that there is an issue by putting the unqualified student directly into the regular English course.

But the real strength of the decision to keep the unqualified student in a special class is that it prevents him—either permanently or until he has learned enough to keep up decently—from slowing down the pace that qualified students can maintain. For it is a fact that unqualified students exist in substantial numbers on state college campuses (and elsewhere) and will continue to for some time to come; until it is possible to eliminate

them by a higher entrance requirement, it seems pointless to eliminate the remedial course and put the students who need it directly in the regular English course. An English instructor cannot be expected to hold up a standard for his classes that he knows one-fifth of his students cannot possibly reach. The qualities that make him a teacher in the first place will not permit him to be so arbitrarily impersonal. He knows that his unqualified students will ask most earnestly for further explanations, for more than their share of conferences, for all the extra help that eventually will force him to discuss sentence fragments in class instead of paragraph unity, to assign the reading of one essay a week instead of two or three, to ask for one-page instead of three-page themes, and finally to teach a course that is remedial in all but name. At this point he will find himself in the same place he and his colleagues started from twenty years ago, and ahead of him the dismal prospect of being made to live through again that whole unhappy history of the remedial course in American higher education.

GLENN LEGGETT

State College of Washington

For more than 30 years the English department of the State College of Washington has required subfreshman composition (now called English 099) of the lower segment of entering freshmen. For the last ten years or so placement has been based upon an objective, machine-scored test. Placement by test, however, was not final. During the first weeks of the semester a student could gain promotion by a demonstration of his writing and perhaps by additional tests. The subfreshman course meets twice a week and yields no credit. The subfreshman group has averaged 16 percent of the entering class for the past five years. There is some, but not particularly significant, variation from year to year.

The members of the English department have considered and reconsidered this course over the years without making any important change. But pressure of student population on faculty availability in recent years and the prospect of even greater pressure in the near future have forced that consideration in the direction of action.

The department recently recommended to the administration that the course be placed under general college extension. Two immediate results would occur. The students would pay a special fee for instruction, and the department would be freed of the financial burden of teaching a non-college course. It is hoped that the fee would have healthful psychological effect upon high school students and make them aware of their responsibility to be adequately prepared.

If the recommendation is approved, the department will retain control over such matters as determining course content, selecting textbooks, scheduling sections, and selecting teachers. Qualified local people not now members of the department are available to instruct these classes. If regular department members instructed the classes they would work on an extra-load and extra-compensation basis as do other staff members who teach in general college extension.

The college is on a two-year catalog, the next one being issued for 1958-1960. To arrange for inclusion of the proposed plan in the next catalog and to allow time to inform the high schools, the department has suggested that the plan be put into effect with the fall semester of 1958.

BRYSON L. JAYNES

Wayne State University

At Wayne we ceased giving subfreshman English for our regular day students a year and a half ago; beginning with

the fall semester, 1956, remedial English was not available for matriculated (day) students. Both last year and this year we continued to carry on a placement system in the evening classes and continued to put a considerable number of students into subfreshman English. Next year, however, we plan to reduce the extent of subfreshman English still further, but we will continue to make it available among our evening offerings. The dropping of the placement system and of remedial English came in conjunction with a considerable revision of the freshman courses. We have made and will continue to make every effort to see to it that the dropping of remedial English does not result in a lowering of the composition standard. One of the factors that entered into our decision to drop remedial work was our belief that the result of it on our campus was not commensurable with the effort we put into it.

KEITH HOLLINGSWORTH

University of Wisconsin

In general I think I could say that the manifesto from the University of Illinois has not up to the present affected our policies and plans in freshman English. After initial testing each fall we refuse to accept into the standard freshman English course a certain number of students, usually less than 2% of the freshman class. The size of this group has remained fairly constant in recent years.

We do not feel that the high schools are neglecting English completely but we realize that the increasing enrollments and heavy burdens laid on the teachers have prevented the amount of attention to composition that we would like. You are perhaps familiar with the bulletin, "The Evaluation of Student Writing," by Mrs. Ednah Thomas of our freshman English program. This bulletin was prepared to aid the high school teachers in improving the quality of theme correc-

tion. So far as I know there is no movement at present to change our procedures in this matter. Students who are rejected from Freshman English are required to prepare themselves at their own expense. This they may do by private tutoring, by the taking of a correspondence course, or by attending an evening school class.

I would like to add unofficially and as my own opinion, I would hope that the

universities of the Mid-West might form a joint co-operative committee on the freshman English problem. Standards of administration and tests to satisfy such standards would be a valuable outcome of such a committee. The effect on high schools I think would also be salutary since they would know more specifically how students will be tested in English when they enter the various colleges and universities.

ROBERT C. POOLEY

The Unprepared Student at the University of Illinois¹

CHARLES W. ROBERTS²

Our topic is the unprepared student and what to do with him or for him. The University of Illinois has devised a plan which we think will virtually eliminate the unprepared student. This sounds brutal and lacking in compassion, doesn't it? It seems to indicate that we plan to set up such rigid entrance requirements that only top-notch scholars need apply for admission or that we plan to admit all comers and then promptly fail out those who prove unprepared to handle college work. We have, of course, no such intentions. But we do hope to eliminate the unprepared student. We think the course of action which we have decided to pursue will, by devious and subtle means, make the unprepared student an extremely rare, if not wholly extinct species on our campus.

I should make clear at the outset that the University of Illinois considers itself a vital and integral part of the public school system of the state and is nec-

essarily concerned with what goes on at all levels in that system. We appreciate the fact that our particular responsibility is to offer various types of higher education to the young people of our state. By the same token we are under no obligation to offer elementary school or high school courses on our college campus. We do share with other colleges in the state the responsibility of training teachers for work at the elementary and secondary levels and for giving them the benefit of our counsel and guidance. What we at the college level are able to do for a student depends in no small measure on what his earlier teachers have been able to do for him. And insofar as we can assist elementary and secondary school teachers with their work we are, in effect, helping ourselves with our work.

Several years ago our University Senate Committee on Student English made a study of our English Department program for Freshman Rhetoric and made certain recommendations for its improvement. In the course of its study,

¹A paper presented in Panel VI, Conference on College Composition and Communication, March 23, 1957, Hotel Morrison, Chicago.

²University of Illinois

the Committee discovered that the Department had for years been doing things it was not properly authorized to do and they advised us to cease and desist. Professor Gordon N. Ray, the head of our Department, accepted the advice of the committee and told me, as Chairman of Freshman Rhetoric, to initiate action within the department which would put us back where we belonged. I wrote Professor Ray the following letter on January 31, 1955:

As Chairman of Freshman Rhetoric, I wish to recommend that the Department of English drop Rhetoric 100 from its course offerings after the 1959 summer session.

The reasons for my recommendations are these:

1. In offering Rhetoric 100, a remedial course for which no University credit is given, the Department of English assumes a responsibility which belongs to the preparatory schools.
2. In testing all entering freshmen and in denying some admission to Rhetoric 101, the Department of English assumes a responsibility which belongs to the Office of Admissions or the Committee on Admissions from Secondary Schools.
3. A date four years hence is indicated to give the Office of Admissions and the preparatory schools ample time to adjust to the change. It will also give the Department time to make clear what its Freshman Rhetoric standards are and also what sort of preparation it recommends for students planning to meet these standards.

If the above recommendation is approved, my second recommendation in this connection is that the Department of English announce as soon as possible its intention of dropping Rhetoric 100, and that all University offices and state educational groups which might be concerned be informed of such intention.

Professor Ray felt that this letter was a bit too brief and subtle to carry much weight with the various offices and committees which would be asked to approve our recommendation. So I wrote a second letter on February 1, 1955. It is a long and tedious thing of almost two

pages, but it seemed sufficient. It was duly mimeographed and tacked on to the recommendation, riding along with it as it picked up unanimous approval all along the line. And it was this second inter-office memorandum which was released to the press after the Board of Trustees took final action. When the newspapers got hold of it, I suddenly found myself almost as notorious as Rudolph Flesch.

I would like to read several sentences from the February 1 letter:

If Rhetoric 100 were dropped and all new freshmen were put into Rhetoric 101, as they are put into every other freshman course, on a sink-or-swim basis, we might expect a rise in the percentage of semester failures to a normal 10 or 15%, or two or three students out of every twenty . . . The same students would fail. The only difference would be that they would fail sooner and clear the way for the admission of better qualified students. If [—and this is important—] if our campaign to give the high schools fuller information about our standards bears fruit, we might expect to receive fewer and fewer unqualified students and thus reduce the currently rising rate of mortality.

Later on in the letter I made these points:

We simply cannot afford to continue to give a high school-level course in English in addition to our full college-level course offerings. Moreover the University can hardly ask the taxpayers of the state to buy again from us the sort of elementary composition instruction they thought they were buying in their tax investment in their local schools. Certainly laboring to get eighteen-year old young men to tell the difference between *THEIR* and *THERE* is not the proper business of higher education. Yet that is the sort of instruction we have to offer in Rhetoric 100.

The money we now spend on Rhetoric 100 high school work should be spent on strengthening our college-level instruction in Rhetoric 101 and Rhetoric 102.

As you know, the above arguments seemed valid to all concerned and we took decisive action. If you wish a fuller

statement you will find it in the May 1956 issue of our *College Composition and Communication* Bulletin. Professor Harris Wilson provides an excellent summary under the title "Illinois vs. Illiteracy."

As you well know, the stand which the University of Illinois has taken has provoked widespread comment. Last fall, for example, Mr. Fred M. Hechinger, formerly education editor of the *New York Herald Tribune*, opened the annual education survey of the *Saturday Review* with these remarks:

"In 1956 the University of Illinois served notice on the high schools that by September 1960 its freshmen will no longer be offered a course in remedial English. In plain words this means that the pupils who will be entering high school this fall are expected to be fully prepared to enter college four years later—or be turned down.

"This," continues Mr. Hechinger, "may seem an odd introduction to a survey of the current education scene. But the Ultimatum of Illinois may well mark the turning of the tide: a new search for quality within the mass education system.

"More than ever before," he continues, "schools and education leaders this past year began to check their academic inventory. This is what they appear to have found: The dream of universal education has pretty completely come true. The first phase of the American public school epic is coming to an end. In the second phase it would have to be demonstrated that quality need not be plowed under by quantity."

Now I am not yet convinced that our decision to drop our little old Rhetoric 100 course is so historic as to mark a new epoch in American education. And I am not sure yet that we have started a trend or turned a tide. But I can report that the stand we have taken has received

hearty endorsement from school administrators, high school English teachers, and the general public in the State of Illinois.

To many timid folk this response came as a great surprise. They feared that our action would lead to strained public relations, that secondary school people would protest about University dictation, that the general public would accuse the state university of trying to go ivy-league and exclusive. Needless to say, we had to allay these apprehensions before we moved.

When, in February of 1955, I proposed that we drop our remedial English work, I made the following observations:

... in my twenty-six years of work with Freshman Rhetoric at the University of Illinois, I have not seen a more opportune time than the present in which to straighten out the lines of responsibility in English instruction in the entire public school system. The good sense of public school administrators and teachers is beginning to assert itself. The accompanying resolutions adopted by the Illinois Association of Teachers of English are most heartening. If the one recommendation of a theme a week throughout the four years of high school were generally accepted, our remedial problems, at the college level, would vanish.

When I said above that "good sense ... is beginning to reassert itself," I implied that we have been suffering through a period dominated by educational nonsense. Since this nonsense is largely responsible for the hordes of unprepared students dumped on our doorstep annually, I would like to take a few minutes to examine two particular brands. One educational doctrine which has gained favor in recent years and has undermined the position of the English teacher is this: that not all young people need to learn how to read and write.

This particular educational philosophy was most eloquently stated by Mr. R. H. Lauchner when he addressed the Na-

tional Association of Secondary School Principals in its 1951 annual meeting. Here is what he said: "When we come to the realization that not every child has to read, figure, write and spell . . . that many of them either cannot or will not master these chores . . . then we shall be on the road to improving the junior high school curriculum. Between this day and that a lot of selling must take place. But it's coming."

Let me hasten to put alongside that abject willingness to surrender to illiteracy, a resolution approved by the Illinois Association of Teachers of English in 1954.

"Be it resolved that the primary job of the teacher of English [in the high school] is to teach all students to read and write so that each and every one of them may become an informed, thoughtful, and articulate member of our democratic society."

There you find an admirable statement of our American democratic ideal of a sound education for all.

There is another educational doctrine current which is almost as vicious as the one which cheerfully accepts illiteracy, and it is one which should be of grave concern to members of this organization since it is endorsed by the Curriculum Commission of the National Council of Teachers of English. This doctrine relates to the English teacher's efforts to clarify and maintain standards and to demand a certain quantity and quality of work from a student before giving him a passing grade in an English course.

In Volume I of the *English Language Arts* series, pages 37-38, the Commission has this to say on the matter of standards:

Much has been said in the past regarding 'standards' in the schools. Attempts have often been made to list the minimum standards that should be reached by a pupil before he should be promoted to the next grade. The chief results of the application

of such standards have been frustration and bitterness for thousands of children each year.

The amount of damage that has been done to the mental health of boys and girls by the academic machinery of schools, with their arbitrary standards for grading and promotion, is beyond estimation. The discouragement and resentment toward society created in the individual by being listed as a "failure" sometimes develops in later life into a continuous battle against the standards imposed by law and social conventions.

At a later point (page 189) in the book, we are told flatly that "the establishment of objective standards for the various grade levels becomes impossible in the light of the Commission's educational philosophy." If you should ask me, I would say that the light of the Commission's educational philosophy is mighty dim on this particular problem of standards.

Perhaps it is time we returned to our topic of the unprepared student and the problem of what to do with him. We might ask first how he got that way, how or why twelve years of public schooling have left him so unprepared to tackle higher education. The answer is simply this: he came through an elementary school which promoted him from grade to grade regardless of whether he had completed requirements or met certain standards for promotion. He came through a secondary school which assumed that he was not college-bound and segregated him into a so-called terminal program which finally provided him with a diploma which was nothing more than a certificate of attendance. He came from this sort of a fool's paradise into our colleges and universities to discover to his great consternation that we cannot give him a higher education simply because he has not yet learned to read and write.

Let me give you an actual case history of just such an unprepared student. It came to me in one of the hundreds of

letters which I have received since our new policy was announced. There are references in the letter to a series of excellent newspaper articles by Marcia Winn, feature writer on the *Chicago Tribune*.

Dear Sir:

As a graduate of the University, and the father of a boy who fell by the wayside in your Remedial English Course about ten years ago, I have been keenly interested in the articles appearing the past two weeks in the *Chicago Tribune*. I certainly approve the University action, and it is high time the deplorable situation be brought out into the open.

It occurs to me that you might be interested to know what happened to some of those who failed the remedial course, and I take the liberty of telling you briefly of my son's experience. As a graduate of high school, he had been exposed to what was supposed to be a first-class English course, but having prepared for an Agricultural Course, perhaps he was permitted to "get by" on the English. However, just at graduation he decided to take a Liberal Arts Course instead, and was so badly prepared in other respects that he was in trouble from the moment he arrived in Champaign. By Thanksgiving it was evident that he was failing, and the University "clinic" [Student Counselling Service] advised him to withdraw and get some basic English, then enter a small college.

The boy realized his deficiencies, and after consulting with high school authorities without getting much help, he decided his troubles went farther back and persuaded a fifth-grade teacher to take him on and teach him the really basic work. After eight months of evening work (he worked in a machine shop during the days), he passed College Board exams in English and went to a small school for a year of liberal arts, after which he shifted schools and courses and graduated as a Forester. After two years in the Army he returned and in 1955 got his Masters Degree in Forest Management, and is now an Assistant Forester for a big paper company.

I am not an educator, but to me every example cited in the articles I have read, points out exactly what my son decided for himself—that is, that the failure was in the elementary school rather than in the high school. Yet, not one mention of this

possibility has appeared in the articles. We learn to read, write, and spell in the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. Why not go there to remedy the situation?

Yours very truly,

P.S. If you note spelling and punctuation errors above, some of them at least, may be charged to the fact that I am blind, and my self-taught "touch" system sometimes goes a bit "haywire."

That is the end of the letter. I would like to observe that that troubled parent is not half so blind as some of the educators I have been quoting. He sees clearly in the experience of his own son the actual consequences of the two unsound educational philosophies we have been discussing, and he sees our action as a repudiation of those philosophies.

Many, many others in key positions understand our intentions and are giving us solid support. Here for example is a typical letter from a city superintendent.

"We hope as do you that University and high school cooperation can improve our English program. Discontinuance of your non-credit Rhetoric course will perhaps serve to encourage our teachers to develop a better course for prospective college students. It too may inspire us administrators to develop a better overall English program in both elementary and secondary areas. We must give *all* students a better command of the English language. Your efforts have helped in that educators and students alike have become conscious of our inadequacies."

And here are some excerpts from a letter dated March 15, 1956, written by Mr. Vernon L. Nickell, our State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and addressed to all Illinois school administrators.

Here are a few suggestions that you may find helpful as you continuously attempt to improve the work in English. I have had elementary teachers, as well as high school

teachers, say to me that they are not certain of what specifics they should attempt to master at each grade level. It may be helpful if an outline from first grade through high school is developed, specifying just what each grade level should accomplish in grammar and written work. The development of such a program provides a fine educational and curricular experience for teachers and administrators working together . . .

When desirable standards of mastery have been established at each grade level, it would be wise, I believe, to see that they are achieved and maintained through organized and coordinated teaching. Other-

wise, some of our youth may experience serious difficulty in moving from grade to grade, school to school, and from school to college.

Now although Mr. Nickell makes no direct reference to the action of the University of Illinois and we wish to take no credit for his statements, we are encouraged to note that his thinking coincides with ours in planning the steps necessary to eliminate the unprepared student and to provide a sound English education for all young people in the state of Illinois.

The College Readiness Program: An Experiment at Oklahoma¹

J. L. KENDALL²

The Department of English at the University of Oklahoma has for the last four years attempted to meet the problem of the unprepared student by placing in special sections of English I those students whose scores in the Ohio State Psychological Examination were in the lowest three deciles. It was hoped that this arrangement would sufficiently facilitate the task of giving special training in the fundamentals of language to students in need of it so that the burden of a remedial course could be avoided. The Department recently decided, however, to recommend that this arrangement be discontinued. Experience has shown that instructors in the so-called basic sections tend either to stress the study of grammar to the almost complete exclusion of rhetoric or to present practically the same material as that given in the regular sections. The Department would still prefer not to establish an

extra course; but it recognizes that unless the University adopts general admission requirements—and it seems unlikely that this will occur in the very near future—the unprepared student will present a problem hard to ignore.

But the problem of the poorly qualified entering student is not that of the English Department alone. The Department of Mathematics this semester found it necessary to offer eight sections of Math A, the three-hour, one-credit remedial algebra course. Although the tests used in assigning students to these classes are not the same as those used by the English Department, a high percentage of the students taking Math A will be found in the basic English sections. And these same students are likely to be having difficulty in such courses as Government, American History, and French.

Recognizing that unpreparedness is usually not a matter of a particular deficiency, the University College, under Dean Glenn C. Couch, has planned for

¹A paper presented in Panel VI, Conference on College Composition and Communication, March 23, 1957, Hotel Morrison, Chicago.

²University of Oklahoma

this summer an experimental program which will constitute a new approach to the whole difficulty. This is the College Readiness Program, an eight-week, non-credit course of study providing integrated training in composition, mathematics, vocabulary and reading. The aim of the program is to improve the quality of work done in all beginning courses by three principal means: first, by giving inadequately prepared students a preview of college work; secondly, by helping them make up special deficiencies; and finally by providing them with the basic skills requisite for successful performance in every area of study—the ability to think clearly, to read and study efficiently, and to express themselves effectively.

In order that the University as well as the students may benefit, the course will be offered only in the summer, when there will be no difficulty in providing facilities, and the students will be required to bear most of the expense. The fee for the course will be \$100.00 and an additional \$125.00 will be charged for lodging and meals in student dormitories. Enrollment will of course be voluntary. All high school graduates have been invited to apply, but final acceptance will depend on the results of aptitude tests which each applicant must take at the University. The present plan is to admit only students whose scores in the Ohio State Psychological Examination are in the lowest five deciles and whose scores in the various achievement tests are below average. For the experimental session this summer only two classes of 25 students each will be formed.

Since the program is still in the planning stage I can give only a general description of the content and methods of the four courses. The reading course will be conducted by the University Reading Clinic under the direction of Dr. Arthur Heilman, and will be similar to the courses offered everywhere by such clinics.

Dr. Philip Nolan of the Classics Department, who will direct the vocabulary study, plans to use as the basis of his instruction the procedures of his course entitled "Latin in English." The mathematics course, to be taught by Dr. Gene Levy, will have much the same content as Math A. I need not here describe the content of the composition course; it will suffice to say that there will be plenty of emphasis on the fundamentals of grammar and rhetoric.

The College Readiness Program, however, aims to do more than simply provide review or remedial work in the three R's. The distinguishing feature of the program will be a special effort to integrate the work of the four courses in such a way as to give the students intensive instruction and extensive practical training in the use of the basic processes of orderly thinking and to impress upon them the need for such discipline in all of their work. I refer to such matters as the general nature and function of symbols; the nature and purpose of definition; the principles of classification and analysis; the meaning of abstraction and generalization; the use of analogy; the types of logical propositions and the possible relations between them; the kinds of logical procedure, and the methods of problem solving.

This special emphasis on integration will affect considerably both the content and the methods of the four courses. For example, the instructors in vocabulary, composition, and mathematics will make a concerted and simultaneous effort at the beginning of the term to urge upon the students the importance of precise definition and the consistent use of terms. In his composition class as well as in the reading lab the student will be learning how to recognize quickly patterns of thought in paragraphs by seizing upon key relational words. The composition and mathematics instructors will cooperate in showing him that the techniques

of problem-solving which he employs in algebra can also be used in the organization of an essay, and that a knowledge of the principles of sentence structure and grammar can help him solve word-problems in algebra.

To facilitate this task, common materials will be used as much as possible. For example—I quote from the announcement which has been sent to the high schools of the state—"while working on reading comprehension, the student may be practicing simple word problems of algebra, or while improving his reading rate, the student may be working with selections which are the basis for papers he will be assigned in his writing class." It might be added that the student at the same time may be learning in his vocabulary class the roots and etymologies of some of the words which he is encountering in such exercises. In fact, Professor Nolan will make a point of anticipating the work of the other three classes in drawing up his vocabulary lists. As a result the students will not have the usual experience of being disconcerted at coming upon unfamiliar and forbidding terminology in their math and composition classes. Instead of feeling that he is in alien territory when he meets such terms as *radical*, *functions*, *binominal*, *induction*, *integral*, *quadratic*, *commutative*, *prime expression*, *evolution*, *coefficient*, *predication*, *exposition*, *subordination*, *denotation*, *abstraction*, and the like, the student will feel instead that he has an initial advantage, and will be eager to put his knowledge to use.

Another benefit may accrue, incidentally, from this effort to integrate the work of the courses. It is hoped that from the instructors' interest in the work which the student is or will be doing, not only in all four courses of the program but also in the other courses of his first year of college, the student himself

will gain some conception of the range of interests of the truly educated man.

During the experimental session integration of the work can be achieved simply by close communication among the instructors and constant improvisation. When the number of classes increases, coordinated course outlines will be required. Instructors' conferences this summer should supply plenty of useful suggestions for materials.

In the composition course as in the others the main emphasis will be placed on orderly thinking. Most of the first week will be devoted to a simplified explanation of the basic requirements for successful communication, a review of the possible relations between ideas and propositions, and a summary discussion of the techniques for organizing and developing ideas. This work will provide a basis for a functional approach to the problem of sentence structure like that used in Brooks and Warren's *Modern Rhetoric*. The study of syntax will be presented as having two main aims: first, to reveal the ways of expressing the logical relations which have been under consideration; and second, to provide the methods of indicating the relative importance or the degree of relevance of thoughts in organized discourse. The students will be required, for example, to be able to list both the constructions and the particular conjunctions by means of which such relations or ideas as implication, concession, causation, condition, and simultaneity can be expressed.

The subject of punctuation will be taken up next, as being closely related to the matter of sentence structure. The explanation of structural marking will be followed by a review of the conventional uses of punctuation. And this general procedure will be employed in every stage of the course; the study will proceed, that is to say, from logical principles to the rules and conventions of

mechanics and rhetoric. After a thorough review of common faults in grammar and punctuation the class will go on to a more detailed study of the organization of larger units of thought and the methods of making organization clear to the reader; then to the study of usage of good expository style as a matter of appropriateness in usage; and finally to the principles of affective communication and related aspects of style.

Throughout the course there will be frequent review sessions, and a certain amount of time will be devoted to old-fashioned drilling—but only after every effort has been made to explain the logical basis of the precepts which are to be committed to memory. About one-third of the class time will be given to practical work, including both writing and criticism.

Integration with the other courses of the program, then, will be effected in two ways. First, to reiterate, materials from other classes will be used for analysis as much as possible. More important, however, will be the attempt to show the students that the principles of logic and semantics and general methodical procedure that are involved in improving reading comprehension and mastering word-problems in algebra apply equally well to the problem of achieving clear and fluent written expression of ideas.

This effort will be pursued, of course, only insofar as it seems to be really helpful. I should like to emphasize that this summer's work will be experimental.

The success of the program will be measured by means of examinations similar to those which the students were required to take before being admitted, and, of course, by the students' performance during their first year at the University. If significant general improvement can be seen, the program will be expanded to admit all high school grad-

uates who need and desire to take the work.

Ultimately the effects of the program—if it is successful—will be visible in a decrease in the number of students enrolled in remedial courses and in the number of failures in elementary courses of all kinds. These decreases, incidentally, may not come entirely as a result of the benefits received by the students from the training. An unpublicized aim of the program will be to tactfully discourage from entering the University those students who simply lack the intelligence required for work at the university level. This end might be achieved by suggesting to the student that he defer his college work for a year or two, perhaps until his military obligations had been met, or that he begin at a school where additional remedial work could be obtained.

Moreover, great interest in the program has been evinced by educators throughout the state. It may be that this will lead to an improvement in the quality of instruction in the secondary schools and to increased emphasis on the college preparatory program.

The principal objection to the plan that has been raised so far is that since the work is not required for admission to the University and carries no university credit, and particularly since the students must themselves bear much of the expense, no great enrollment can be expected. While recognizing that the expense will be prohibitive to many prospective students, the originators of the program feel that most of the people who most need the work will be able and willing to enroll. The very fact that the program is being inaugurated should do much to impress upon both students and parents that serious difficulties lie ahead of the person whose scholastic achievement in high school has been unexceptional.

No one expects the College Readiness Program by itself to solve the problem of the unprepared student. Our most sanguine hope is that it will reduce the need for regular remedial courses to manageable proportions, and that it will

in other ways, with the aid of other measures, materially lessen the financial burden imposed by increasing enrollments while making it possible to maintain high academic standards at the University.

Letters to My Students

MARGARET PRICE HOKE¹

During the Christmas holidays I re-read many themes from my college classes in English Zero this semester. These are a few of the notes of criticism I wrote to my handicapped students.

Dear Miss D: You have indeed progressed from primer—"choppy"—writing through the monotonous "and-so" sentence to a fairly smooth, natural style.

Make more use of your talent for descriptive detail. I remember your dear, stupid dog—"her coal-black curls—her dust mop feet . . . After her bath the simple thing would go out to roll in the mud." And your little sister! "Her eyes were as blue as the summer sky" is a once-shining simile tarnished by wide use; but when the child "yanked at your necklace, sank her needle-pointed teeth into your arm, and smiled angelically at your mother," I became interested in the little demon.

Why is there no trace of such vivid imagery in your argumentative theme of last week? "My reason for abolishing the unpleasantness bestowed upon pledges and junior members of fraternal organizations can best be formulated by first defining hazing." This vague, wordy statement, vitiated by the passive voice, is not you. In debate one picture is worth a page of axioms.

Dear Mr. B: Thank you for dropping the ubiquitous "you" from your themes.

The most horrible examples of the "you-you" fault are infantile introductions, "I am going to attempt to describe to you, in such a way that you can plainly see it, an experience of my childhood," and childish closes, "So I have proved to you the advantage of good study habits, don't you agree?" Such non-communicative communications are merely space-fillers.

By use of an ink eradiator you have removed the offensive pronoun. But may I be frank? To become a writer, you must be born again. Every one of your sentences conceals your keen intelligence. Your justification of our college athletic program, "The spectators obtain much healthful exercise going to and from the games," (probably true under our present parking system) reveals the mental anguish of a reluctant writer straining for something to say.

After Christmas will you write one page upon a topic in which you are sincerely interested? In eagerness to get to the point you will naturally forego this senseless padding. Succinctness is a by-product of the author's zeal.

Dear Mr. L: I have enjoyed your experiences in the Air Force: the day you decided to get married, your brush with death in Korea, your receipt of the cable announcing the birth of your son. You are right: creative writing is molded

¹West Virginia University

from the stuff of life. It is so much easier to tell the truth than to lie, isn't it?

One word of caution! Pay more attention to mechanical detail. Your last theme has but one red mark, a tiny circle enclosing a superfluous comma. Yet one crazy, meddlesome comma can ruin the beauty of a page. When you wrote, "Seeing my child's delight with his Christmas toys, gave me a thrill," why, why did you insert that comma? Were you hazy regarding the gerund subject as part of an introductory participial phrase? Dry-as-dust grammatical principles have practical uses. Apply your knowledge of grammar to your writing. And keep your sense of humor. Never place a comma between *roller* and *skates*.

Dear Miss G: Your themes are too fat. Your first aeroplane trip! Oh, my! When your sister invited you to visit her, your father, after weighty consideration, consented to the trip. At last, at the end of page two you got on the aeroplane; you left at 4:17 and landed at 6:05. My dear, a theme must be more interesting than life. Brushing one's teeth and washing dishes do not make good copy. Discard wisely before you play your hand. Five minutes of thought is worth a page of scribbling.

Now that you have slowed down a bit, your sentences do not crash into each other. But remember! The mild little *and* cannot show all relationships: causes, contrasts, results expected and unexpect-

ed. At our next conference we shall discuss these principles: Writing a theme is not like stringing beads; it is more like the process of molding a small statue from clay.

Dear Mr. S: May I remove some of your themes from the files and press them in my memory book? The day you shot the bull and went home and took a licking? Christmas on ship when Santa Claus wore bell-bottomed trousers and a white hat? The Sunday long ago when your family piled into a sleigh, visited the neighbors and came home singing in the dark? Sometimes I wonder: Did these things happen? Even if the land to which you transport me is make-believe, I can walk there on solid ground.

The other day, speaking of you, one of your classmates said, "I can't figure him out." You passed the placement test and then took English Zero voluntarily! . . . I think I understand. Among hordes of devotees of the "get-by" cult, there are a few students who simply want to learn. Your earnest study of the so-called rules for writing has not shackled you, has it? Do you not sense a growing power of expression? Of course, after weeks of setting upright your topsy-turvy clauses, you discovered that Mr. Flesch does not condemn upside-down subordination. Now that you have learned the rules, you are free to break them.

Almost I would persuade you to make writing your profession. At any rate, let writing be your hobby and your life.

Some Doubts About Ability Sectioning

PAUL C. WERMUTH¹

Every September, thousands of freshmen sit docilely at long tables, in alternate seats, under the keen eyes of hundreds of instructors, taking what is called a "placement" test in English. While the origin of this annual agony seems to be lost in obscurity, many administrators no doubt still think it a good thing. It seems to me, however, that a closer examination would reveal that its results are essentially pointless, ineffective, wasteful in the extreme, and detrimental to both teacher and student. Although I do not think these tests do very well even what they purport to do, my real point here is that what they purport to do is not worth doing. In other words, the whole idea of separating students according to their supposed ability or previous preparation in English is a doubtful practice.

I suppose the original purpose of these tests was to simplify the teaching of English by putting students into association only with others of approximately equal ability. In this way, the level of a class could be more easily ascertained by the teacher, and he would know where he was at all times. Furthermore, the student, if of great ability, could be taught more and would progress faster than the average or dull student, while said average or dull student would be relieved of the embarrassment of contrast, and more modest aims required of him. Thus everyone would be happy, the teacher because his task was simplified, the student because he was asked to do what he could do.

Perhaps these purposes were actually fulfilled to the degree that we can now see what was wrong with them. The teacher's job may actually have been sim-

plified in a sense, but at the cost of boring him nearly to death. Perhaps the average or dull student does feel better psychologically, though at the cost of a false representation of his relative competence, and a too great concern on our part with his (essentially private) psychological life. And certainly all this has been achieved through an enormously complex and expensive administrative apparatus which is hardly justified by the results. Let us here examine these results in greater detail.

In most colleges these tests divide the freshmen into three or four groups. The worst are put into "bonehead" sections, and the small handful of students with the very highest scores are excused from freshman composition altogether. The remainder and great majority are subsequently divided into A and B sections.

Bonehead English, to begin at the bottom, is a tremendous waste of time and money, and any college is foolish to attempt to salvage anything from these classes. In the first place, the score below which one is placed in such a section is usually so low as to be absurd. If, on a test of 150 questions, a student can get no more than 45 correct, he simply is not college material, even if the test is about baseball. In the second place, the classes themselves are largely futile. Most of the students flunk the course anyway, and those who squeak by with a D (often the result of the instructor's sympathy or uncertainty) will most probably collapse later somewhere along the line. Thirdly, teaching such classes is the purest agony to most college instructors. The students after four weeks or so guess that they will probably fail and give up trying; the instructor guesses they have given up and he stops trying, too, and devotes his attention to

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other classes in which something may yet be accomplished.

Of course, there is an economic side to the problem, which is that many colleges purposely keep the boneheads around as long as possible in order to collect their fees. Disregarding the argument that such disreputable practice is a losing proposition in the long run, one might simply point to the approaching growth in college enrollments, which will doubtless make such a consideration no longer necessary. There should be plenty of applicants for everyone, and I, for one, look forward with eagerness to seeing bonehead English permanently abolished in every college in the country. I note with satisfaction that some colleges, notably the University of Illinois, have already taken this step.

At the opposite end of the scale from the boneheads are those few students who are excused from freshman English entirely. This is a doubtful practice. Since most placement tests are of the purely mechanical, multiple-choice type, there is no way of knowing if these people can write a coherent essay, and of course they often cannot. They still need training in composition and should not be deprived of it because they succeeded in answering 100-odd questions about formal grammar and usage more or less correctly. At least, if they are to be separated from the other students, they should be required to take a course in advanced composition so as to be exposed to this material. Certainly they should not be excused from all English and permitted to take, say *Hydraulics 206*. And I tend to think that they should take the standard freshman English course that everyone else takes.

One of the chief absurdities of this testing system lies in the further division of the great majority into A and B sections. There are naturally considerably fewer A sections than B sections, since these are the students who in a normal

class could be expected to get B's, perhaps a few A's. Needless to add, these few sections are usually given to the older members of the department as a sort of reward for twenty or so years of faithful labor, leaving the B sections for the rest of the teachers in the department.

What is wrong with teaching B sections? They are dull, almost unbearably so. In such classes there is a dead level of achievement, unbroken by the occasional good paper or good student found in a balanced class. The teacher is quickly bored by the lack of variety, is unable to stimulate the class by using the better students to charge the others, and rarely has a paper good enough to read as an example of the possible. Further, the teacher eventually suspects he may be losing his own judgment, his sense of comparison. After passing out long lists of C's and D's, he begins to wonder whether or not he would recognize a good paper if he saw it. With no A papers to remind him of quality, he might be forgiven if he begins to invent it and gradually succumbs to the illusion that some of his C papers really are beginning to resemble B papers. He strains, in other words, to give out better grades in the belief that something may be wrong with himself. He is merely the victim of unrelieved mediocrity.

The student, too, suffers here more than might be supposed. First, a class in which everyone is approximately equal is indeed a dull one. More than that, however; the student himself lacks anything to compare himself with except his peers. In general, one might safely say that good students study hard; they do more work than they have to; they speak out more in class; and they write better papers. All of these stand to the mediocre student as accomplishments possible to a person his age; and what is more important, accomplishments expected of a college student. If he has any ability at

all, the presence of good students should help stimulate him to greater effort and quality. Unfortunately, in a B section the student can (and usually does) assume that since no one else does better than he, the instructor's demands must be preposterous.

Nor is this yet the entire story. Every instructor who has taught B sections dreads the day, about four or five themes into the semester, when the class finds out what everyone is getting; and a baffled face asks the dreaded question: "Doesn't anyone get more than a C in your class?" A legitimate question, indeed, but one difficult to answer. For they never quite believe the explanation and have a vague feeling of having been cheated somewhere along the line. In addition, they have all heard about sliding scales, without exactly knowing what they are except a device by which they might get a higher grade if they had a different teacher. It would help if one could in such a situation pick up and read a good theme and say, "This is an A paper; this was written by one of your classmates." This would surely end the argument; and while some hurt feelings and resentment might yet remain, the student would at least know exactly where he stands in relation to others.

About A sections I am unfortunately not able to speak at first hand, since I have never come close to one. If you are interested in second-hand information, however, some of my more fortunate colleagues tell me that A sections are surprisingly difficult to teach. Like their cousins in B sections, such students quickly find out what kind of group they are in, the result of which is an uncalled-for assurance. Their achievement, after all, is comparative, but nothing can convince such students that they do not know a great deal about the language. This handicaps both teacher and student, since nothing obstructs learning so much as the conviction that one already

knows about the subject. But this, I repeat, is second-hand information.

If we must have a placement test, it should occur before and determine only admission to the college, which should refuse to admit those who do not measure up to a minimum standard of preparation in English. I do not believe any essential injustice will be done, since if a student is serious, has some ability, and has been genuinely shortchanged in high school, he can take a night course or study on his own until he reaches the minimum standard.

One might, of course, always use the democratic argument against placement tests. While I would not be so incautious as to assert that they are *per se* undemocratic, I do believe it might well be more democratic to dispense with them, to dump all the freshmen into the pot, and to stir vigorously. Undoubtedly the best would float to the top, the worst would stick to the bottom (and may be easily scraped out), while the great body of the brew would remain the mediocre student. But at least all would know more precisely where they stand in relation to their fellows and would have a better scale to measure themselves by—and so, incidentally, would the teacher. And perhaps most important for both student and teacher, the classes would be more interesting.

It may be objected that this point of view takes no account of the student's psychological life, and this is probably correct. His psychological life is no concern of ours at this stage of the game; in fact, one of his jobs as a college student is to learn to solve his own emotional problems and to discover his own abilities and shortcomings. One might well argue on the other side of the question, i.e., that shunting the weaker student off into separate classes and giving him usually the least experienced instructors disregards his problems altogether, and is simply a means of getting rid of him.

It may, after all, be a great disadvantage to any student to be always with his own kind. While people in general may tend to associate with others of roughly the same ability, it may well be more valuable to them in college to know all kinds of students, both good and bad; and surely it is an advantage to know the good one is himself. The student who gets an A in chemistry and a D in English is quite possibly not stupid; and he needs to know the student who gets, say, A in English and D in chemistry. The separation of such students on the basis of placement tests is similar to the absurd practice in many colleges of setting up separate English courses for engineering students, as if they were a sort of elite corps. There is nothing an engineering student needs more than to mix with people who are interested in other things; and the same might be said of all students.

I would argue, therefore, for a single, tough, standard Freshman English

course which all students of the college would take on an equal footing with their fellows. This would, incidentally, not only be preferable for both teacher and student on the grounds indicated, but it would also eliminate the enormous waste of time, labor, and expense involved in the annual testing chaos.

Much energy has no doubt been expended on devising these tests in a laudable effort to find some objective standard for measuring competence in English, to give some students the advantage of not-too-tough competition, and to make the teacher's job somewhat easier. But the tests do seek to measure the immeasurable; it may not be the best thing for students to lack all competition; and the ease of finding the level of an approximately equal class does not compensate for the boredom of teaching at that level. I, for one, would like to teach the old-fashioned, difficult, competitive, unsegregated, and much more interesting freshman English class.

The Purpose and Content of Freshman English Composition

ROBERT O. BOWEN¹

In all probability there is no single course more controversial in the American university curriculum than Freshman Composition. Many institutions have titled the course Communication Skills and have included in it such diverse elements as speech and visual aids. Many describe it as an Introduction To English and thereafter see it taught as a course in literary criticism and history. Sometimes it is an "idea course" and involves a series of exciting, though essen-

tially trivial and disorganized, "bull sessions" on social studies. As though in reaction a few English departments have returned to the traditional title, Rhetoric, and present the course as an unbending, mechanical discipline as specifically unrelated to other college work as astronomy.

Recently an English faculty colleague informed me that the only way to teach English was to stand over the student with a twenty-inch ruler and force him to parse; another colleague insisted that

¹Montana State University

the only way was to teach several literary works of the caliber of *Crime and Punishment*. Surely one of these, and perhaps both, are in simple fact wrong.

Where, then, are we to look for a purpose in the composition course? What is its function? Setting aside for the moment professional biases regarding what the course should or could be, we can at once note that the course is a college English effort; and it does not seem unreasonable to draw from this the inference that its product should be a college-level reader and writer. This reasoning would be inaccurate if applied to special writing courses in business colleges or in engineering schools, but for the general university composition course it can be nothing but sound.

The purpose of Freshman English composition is to assist the general student toward an appreciation and a command of the varieties of prose which concern a college-level American reader and writer. Insofar as the course aids the student in writing accurate examination answers and in organizing competent reports, it is a service course in the university curriculum. However, since the language proficiency required for such tasks is indiscernible from that required to produce a professional letter or to read a professional journal, this aspect of training should be considered not so much the "service course" aspect as the minimum, college-level prose proficiency aspect of the course.

Nor does this preclude the taste in fine language which the course must provide in order that the student's knowledge of prose not be limited to a rudimentary mechanical level. The upward limits of taste are set in accordance with general college-level American readings as exemplified in such publications as the *Atlantic Monthly*, the *New Yorker*, the *New York Times*, Thoreau's *Walden*, Marquand's *Point of No Return*, and Hemingway's *Old Man and the*

Sea. General taste in prose is not to be construed as skill in literary criticism or knowledge in literary history since these are special studies much as physiology and paleontology are.

In class discussion care should be exercised that any stimulation the student feels be directed toward the discipline of written language. This policy is especially necessary since the course cannot legitimately follow any frame of reference other than that dictated by prose as a discipline, and the neglect of such discipline can lead only to worse intellectual anarchy in students already weak in the control of orderly thought—as in painful fact most contemporary students are.

The materials necessary to the course are a dictionary, a variety of contemporary or near-contemporary prose readings, and the student papers produced in the course, the latter being of the greatest significance in actual class work. In order that the course maintain its broad nature and that the student not be limited in either taste or skill to a given kind of prose, the readings, which serve as his models, must range from the extremely simple to the subtly complex. Any anthology which contains a wide variety of writings would be suitable so long as those writings were for the most part contemporary American prose. Ideally a text would contain samples from the *Encyclopedia Americana*, *Popular Mechanics*, the *New Yorker*, the *Yale Review*, *Holiday Magazine*, *New World Writing*, and others. No anthology containing more than a trivial fraction of literary criticism or past literature should be used as a basic text, and course materials should be limited, except for the possible inclusion of a minor fraction of short fiction, to non-fiction. A large portion of class time should be devoted to the discussion and revision of student papers, these offering the class opportunity to participate in the polish-

ing of a sentence or paragraph from the crude to the finished state.

Papers should be varied so as to develop in the student a general command of prose rather than a knack in what might prove a very limited area, even though that select area be the teacher's greatest interest. That is, to force literature as such on a general student is no less ambiguous than to force animal physiology on an English major.

Since the course under discussion is a composition course, a great deal of its content must be composition—actual writing. Here, too, there is the problem of holding the work within legitimate limits. Neither literary studies nor worksheet exercises will do. Writing must be both general and typical of college-level language. Furthermore, assignments cannot be set rigidly in advance as they might be in a mathematics or history course where progress is through a definite order which rises out of the subject rather than the student's control of it. A major problem to the composition teacher is that of knowing at any particular period in a term what his class can most profit from in the next period. And he is also required to select topics for assignment that will allow the student to get on with his actual writing almost at once rather than spend time on research necessary to a piece of writing.

Since composition cannot legitimately require a knowledge of gunnery, for instance, the assignment of a paper on *The Evolution of the Iron Ramrod* would be impractical if for no other reason than that it would require most of the student's time to be exhausted in gunnery research. A suitable composition assignment would require no special knowledge beyond that already known to the student. An example of this would be a

few-hundred-word description of a town, city, ranch, etc., such as appeared in "the essay under discussion." This project allows the student to use his available knowledge of fact and to get full value from class discussion of sample readings used in the course.

A course functioning in the form prescribed above could produce reasonable language skill in students. That it does not do so in all cases is not necessarily to be taken as a failure of method. In many instances the flaw lies in the teacher, who was trained in the discipline of literary history rather than composition and, in spite of his vast knowledge of fact and opinion, does not have a grasp of language structure. More frequently the failure is on the part of a lethargic student, who feels that the teacher should somehow excite him toward language discipline. Probably the tendency on the part of younger teachers to turn class periods into "interesting bull sessions" is due to a combination of these two factors. The teacher, zealous though ignorant, mistakes activity for efficiency.

In the contemporary university system the basis of this pedagogical error appears to rise from the presentation of composition as a required course. The student, being forced into the course, demands to be made to like the subject, which he considers a waste of time. An adjustment of this single point would probably have a greater positive effect on the classroom procedure in composition courses than any and all other efforts. For when the student is no longer conscripted into the course, and his failure to produce adequate prose becomes apparent in his other courses, he will enroll with the necessary will to learn, without which any course by any teacher or in any method must fail.

CCCC Spring Meeting, 1957

THE ROVING PARTICIPANT

Once again, to anticipate and supplement official records of the 1957 Conference on College Composition held in the Hotel Morrison, Chicago, March 20-23, appears this account by the Roving Participant. Secretary Joseph Rogers in the October CCC will report action of the Executive Committee, convened for the first time on the Wednesday before the Conference itself opened. The same issue will present brief accounts of discussions in the eighteen scheduled Workshops, eight Panels, and two General Sessions. Several Panel papers appear in this issue; others will appear later.

The word for each successive Conference, whether held on old ground or new, appears to be "the biggest and the best." Unofficial figures for total registration are 800, the "biggest." When all the reunions, events, and discussions are reviewed from a distance, this Conference easily becomes the "best."

The Hotel Morrison holds a special place in the rapidly lengthening memories of CCCC. It is home place to which we return for periodic visits. Despite a new paint job now and then and some face-lifting here and there, it retains its familiar lines (and space accommodations peculiarly suitable to CCCC). Old Morrison, at sometime prior to our first visit, sprouted an annex; but old and new continue independent lives. On many floors corridor carpeting marks the juncture, there are "old" rooms and "new" rooms, and each of the two banks of elevators attends only to its own ups and downs. The visitor needs ingenuity to lay out for himself the shortest path from room to lobby. If he obeys the signs on his floor, he will trace a full rectangle back to his own room door. One way to descend from an intermediate floor is to push the up button; another is to take to

the fire stairs, prepared to retrace several flights if the lower corridor door should be locked.

The routine hotel life that flows around transient CCCC activity offers diversion that a crowded and sober CCCC program allows little time for. Across the corridor from a workshop exploring, perhaps, the Contributions of Anthropology, may suddenly erupt a klatsch of matrons celebrating something or other in joyous screams, and the floor-maids are heard to mutter, "Ya don't get that way on tutti-frutti." Beyond the thin partition of an evening panel on Creative Writing may be warming up the annual jamboree of the American Legion Auxiliary with skits, false noses, paper horns, and splatters of song and impromptu piano solos. One skit, readying itself hilariously in the corridor, nearly absorbed and kidnapped as a super Associate Chairman Robert Tuttle dutifully making his rounds to see what members were doing to his laboriously planned program. A floor corridor may suddenly fill up with strange-shaped bowling enthusiasts in blazers, each carrying his 12-16 pound ball and speaking, perhaps, Lithuanian.

Redoing the lobby can not alter the Morrison; it only makes it impossible for a visitor too proud to sink to the floor in public to sit down outside his own room.

Whenever a Local Committee's labors, begun long before we convene and concluded long after we check out, are successful, they are inconspicuous and under-rewarded. If any emergencies arose at the Morrison, the average registrant remained ignorant of them. Chairman W. C. Jackman had recruited many colleagues at the University of Illinois, Chicago Undergraduate Division: Wayne N. Thompson (publishers' repre-

sentative), Frederick O. Waller (his assistant), Laurette Kirstein (hospitality), Elizabeth V. Wright (finance). From other local institutions came Carl Leffevre, Chicago Teachers College (co-chairman and publicity), J. Paxton Hart, Wright Junior College (registration), Margaret Neville, DePaul University (advance registration), and Mollie Cohen, Illinois Institute of Technology (luncheon). These chairmen were assisted by at least thirty-one others listed on the final program. Participants were gratified to learn that news stories of their attendance had been sent to hometown papers. In registering they were given envelopes bearing their names, provided by Rinehart & Company, containing Conference equipment and a copy of *Exercise Exchange*. (Scott, Foresman had handled mailing of 2500 flyers announcing the meetings.) Available were a map of downtown Chicago and an annotated list of restaurants which enabled gourmets to satisfy their palates in thirteen languages and several varieties of English. Women were honored with orchids flown in from Hawaii. Each morning appeared the "CCCC Extra" edited by G. Griest.

Publishers' exhibits were conveniently and compactly grouped in a brightly lit room adjacent to the registration area. Nearby also but not in view were Secretary Rogers, Gladys Brown, and June Richey directing the Placement Service, which unofficially reports 27 schools served, 56 vacancies listed, and 40 applicants registered. Even an inexperienced observer could note that additional placement, displacement, and replacement activities went on at all times and places, in a decided applicant market. Indeed, one director declared in open meeting that he could still use 20 instructors for September classes.

The Saturday luncheon, climax and conclusion of the Conference, when everyone hopes to look and talk his best,

and generally succeeds, was attended, according to the practiced estimate of Nick Hook, by 182 (note the flourish of the 2!). Chairman Francis Shoemaker set the benevolently genial tone with his story of the "Superlative Horse" by way of introducing the speaker, Henry Rago, Editor of *Poetry Magazine*, who, with few or no notes and a remarkable memory for verse, told why and how a poet writes. At least a few listeners had the impression that they were watching the very process being described.

Central business of CCCC meetings occurs in Executive Committee sessions, general sessions, panels, and workshops, following a schedule anxiously arranged by the Associate Chairman, in 1957 Robert E. Tuttle. Secretary Rogers' account of Executive Committee action has no place for the endless talk of a loquacious group, regardless of hour or extremes of room temperature; nor for noting the simultaneous session of the NCTE Executive Committee in some remote fastness of the Morrison, from which now and then former CCCC officers would appear, speak a few words, and then withdraw; nor for more than mention of the demonstration of "stop-motion sound film" with apparent "lip-synch," under the gracious supervision of L. Mercer Francisco of Francisco Films, an experience which may have demoralized college instructors who observed a golf-playing, high-bracket executive and a golf-playing, high-bracket tax consultant laying their heads together to cut an income tax by more than the gross income of most of us.

Notable among panels and general sessions was the heart-warming talk of President Edward J. Sparling of Roosevelt University which stirred Chairman Albert Kitzhaber to move for mimeographed copies and for publication in this issue of CCC.

For the first time Workshop officers were guided by a manual, prepared by

a committee under Erwin Steinberg. After revision based upon experience it will be printed for annual use. Also new this year, at least as a modification of a 1956 innovation, was scheduling Workshops 12-18 in effect not as seven workshops with four meetings each but as fourteen with two sessions, each with its own topic and officers.

Careful reading of the program raises the question of what is the full and proper scope of CCCC. Could one draw its boundaries by projecting the topics formally discussed at any one Conference? Not accurately, for Workshop reports in the October CCC testify to the range of discussion under even the most specialized topic like Testing the Ability to Listen. And there can be no record of what is discussed in corridors, lounges, and dining rooms. Certain standard topics of past Conferences were missing in 1957: preparation of the c/c teacher, upper-class courses in speech and composition, junior-senior qualifying examinations, technical and business writing. Yet, as a surprise to anyone inclined to define CCCC scope narrowly were far-ranging topics like a critical evaluation of *The English Language Arts in the Secondary School*, measuring the quality of teaching, three on the theory of communication—the psychology of communication, verbal and non-verbal symbolism, the contribution of anthropology—, writing assignments in literature courses, national standards and national accreditation, special problems of the junior college.

The Roving Participant, carrying his folding chair, found capacity or over-capacity attendance at most workshops. The largest and liveliest, as in 1956, discussed the application of structural linguistics; after the first session it moved to larger quarters. The dyed-in-the-phoneme linguists, not as numerous as one might guess, maintain their evangelical zeal, while the rest of us, better informed than we were a year ago thanks

to the publication of several new texts, still seek light and conviction on the practical service of structural linguistics in training a student to speak and write his own language effectively. Mildly disturbing was the apparently diminished concern since 1956 over the predicted flood of freshmen. Certainly, no downward revision of estimates has been published. Perhaps our sentiment is that we now know the figures, we have heard, we assume, of most conceivable devices for coping with the problem—public or closed-circuit television, live lectures to the whole freshman class on rhetorical principles, writing laboratories, teacher-aides recruited from the college community, freshmen teaching one another—and now we await the results of pioneering experiments. Still, since no one has found a way to raise college salaries to the industrial level, and no one has shown how to double and triple the number of first-year graduate students, it would seem folly to relax attack on the problem: the flood we are talking about is even now at the gate.

Perhaps most forward-looking of 1957 Workshop topics was that on the special problems of the junior college. The lower ranks of high school graduates who seek college admission will apparently be turned away because of the number of their betters, as not only private institutions but one state institution after another set up selective admissions tests. Unless the universal American insistence upon the college degree should be abandoned—a shift of national attitude which would take one or two generations were it to occur at all—these lower-ranking students will force their way into some college. Where will they soon be found? In a junior college. But CCCC knows little about the junior college. We have been told that, in general, junior college organization has been patterned upon the secondary school (as 13th and 14th grades) rather than upon the (senior)

college. It seems not unlikely that in ten years almost as many freshmen will sit in c/c classes in junior college as in (senior) college. Who will teach them

there, how will they be taught, and what? These questions, as well as many others, will perhaps find partial answers in the 1958 Conference in Philadelphia.

Secretary's Report No. 17

GLADYS K. BROWN¹

Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee, The Conference on College Composition and Communication, Room 4, Sheraton-Jefferson Hotel, St. Louis, on Thursday, November 22, 1956, 12:15 p.m. to 4:45 p.m. and 10 p.m. to midnight; Chairman Irwin Griggs presiding. Members present: Archer, Beal, Bowersox, Bowman, Brown, Fowler, Frost, Griggs, Grommon, Hook, Kitzhaber, Laird (for Gorrell), McCrimmon, Reisman, Shoemaker, Steinberg, Sutton, Tuttle, Van Gelder, Ward, Wise; committee chairmen present: Allen, Jackman, and Rogers.

1. Chairman Irwin Griggs extended greetings and introduced all persons present. He presented the agenda of usual length with an added sheet of Recommendations to the Executive Committee made by individual Committee members, by officers and former officers, and by certain 1956 Workshops.

2. Willis C. Jackman, chairman of the Local Committee for the March 1957 meeting in Chicago, reported. Mr. Jackman brought up the question of charge for publishers' exhibits. A motion to set the price at \$50.00 for each publisher's booth was made, seconded, and passed.

The choice and appointment of high school representatives in the local areas of convention cities was discussed. It was suggested that future high school representatives be appointed in March. A motion was made, seconded, and passed to the effect that the names of high school representatives not be placed on the CCCC letterhead in the future.

3. Joseph A. Rogers reported briefly on a short conference with Secretary Gladys Brown concerning the Placement Service to be continued under Mr. Rogers' direction. It was moved that the Placement Committee be expanded to five: Joseph Rogers, Gladys Brown, and three other members to be appointed. The motion was seconded and carried.

4. The Past Presidents Panel (1956) was discussed. At Chicago it will be scheduled for late afternoon of Friday, March 22.

5. Treasurer J. N. Hook reported the total CCCC membership peak for the year 1955-56 at 1,063 regular members, and a total CCC circulation peak of 1,296, each a substantial increase over the preceding year. He reported balance in treasury, for November 1, 1956, \$3,343.69. He filed a copy of his report with the secretary.

6. Fees for speakers at annual luncheons were discussed. It was moved that a fee of \$75.00 be paid to Thomas B. Sherman, speaker for the November 1956 luncheon. The motion was seconded and carried.

A motion that for the future the CCCC chairman be empowered to pay at his discretion from \$50.00 to \$100.00 to speakers at the annual luncheon was made, seconded, and passed.

7. Chairman Harold Allen of the Committee on Linguistic Recordings reported for his committee and filed a copy of his report. Mr. Allen suggested that a demonstrator be invited to exhibit his set of tapes at the spring 1957 convention

¹Little Rock Junior College

to as many as are interested in linguistics and are concerned with the ultimate production of tapes. It was moved and passed that the Executive Committee approve the work of the Committee on Linguistic Recordings and that there be a continuing committee. Mr. Allen asked to be relieved of the chairmanship.

A motion to approve the expenditure of whatever amount Mr. Allen incurred in the work of the Committee was made, seconded, and passed.

Mr. Allen urged that the Executive Committee act upon the recommendation of Workshop 3, March, 1956, that the Executive Committee "investigate and seek funds for the preparation of tapes for the teaching of the structure of English." (See CCC October, 1956, pp. 124-126.)

8. Richard Beal moved that the March 1957 meeting of the Executive Committee be scheduled for Wednesday, instead of the usual Thursday, and not later than 2:30 p.m. The motion was seconded and passed.

9. Assistant Chairman Robert Tuttle made a full report of the projected program for March 21, 22, and 23, 1957, and distributed copies of the outlined program for committeemen to fill in with names of suggested persons for definite positions.

Mr. Tuttle also distributed copies of his four-page *Report of Program Chairman—1957* and appealed for data and advice. He discussed in detail the principles proposed for:

- a) selecting topics for the entire March program,
- b) selecting speakers for panels and for general sessions,
- c) selecting workshop officers, and
- d) determining the whole workshop organization.

Mr. Tuttle moved that the Executive Committee recommend that the incoming Assistant Chairman devise a special form, for distribution to workshop offi-

cers only, for the purpose of recommending to him, after the March 1957 meeting, potential workshop members. The motion was seconded and carried.

The meeting recessed at 4:45 and reconvened at 10:00 p.m.

10. Associate Chairman Francis Shoemaker briefly reported the satisfactory results of the March 1956 meeting in New York as shown by the increased membership in the convention area and by the profit of nearly a thousand dollars realized.

11. Secretary Brown reported that of the 878 ballots for the election of the CCCC officers and committeemen, 210 had been returned. The ballots were mailed from the Champaign office on September 17, 1956, and returned to Secretary Brown at Little Rock Junior College on or before November 20.

Mrs. Brown also reported that the Placement Service during the March meeting was aided by graduate students enlisted by Mr. Shoemaker. No accurate count of colleges and instructors aided could be made, but it was evident that there were more openings than instructors available.

A motion authorizing the purchase of new supplies for the secretary was made, seconded, and passed.

12. Editor Bowman reported changes in cover and type to be used for the CCC. Members present were requested to record their preference of sample covers circulated among them.

Mr. Bowman presented a slate of appointees for Committee approval in filling two vacancies on the Editorial Board for the following year. A motion that the slate be approved as presented was made, seconded, and carried.

13. Chairman Griggs opened a discussion concerning the nature of liaison with the NSSC and the appointment of a liaison officer. Mr. Beal moved that the CCCC officers be empowered to discuss with the officers of the NSSC the basis

for appointing or not appointing a liaison officer. The motion was seconded and carried. It was agreed that Editor Bowman would continue to use whatever interchange of materials he could arrange.

14. Erwin Steinberg, chairman of a committee charged with preparing a manual of instructions to workshop leaders, reported such a manual ready for mimeographing and being sent to members of the Executive Committee.

15. Mr. Beal, chairman of the Membership Committee, reported that:

a) letters were sent to all chairmen of Freshman English asking the return of enclosed cards on which the names of all members of the Freshman staff are to be listed,

b) membership letters were sent to all CCCC members with the request that each publicize the work of the CCCC,

c) Editor Bowman will send copies of *College Composition and Communication* to all interested persons,

d) a request was made for suggested names of those interested in helping during January to urge joining the CCCC, and

e) members of the Executive Committee were asked to furnish names of those who may be expected to respond to a letter from Mr. Beal.

16. William Sutton reported progress in the pilot study of Indiana colleges. Upon request, he promised a report of significant items for study at the March meeting.

17. The chairman reported that he had appointed Erwin Steinberg as a temporary representative of CCCC on the NCTE Curriculum Committee. Mr. Kitzhaber moved the nomination of Mr. Steinberg as the permanent representative. The motion was seconded and Mr. Steinberg was unanimously chosen representative.

18. Hermann Bowersox reported the lineup of convention cities: 1957, Chicago; 1958, Philadelphia; 1959, San Fran-

cisco; and 1960, possible choices, New Orleans, especially suggested for inquiries, and five or six other cities in central south, north and east.

19. Robert Tuttle moved that a committee of three be appointed to investigate hotels for the Philadelphia meeting, —the three to be Francis Shoemaker, Irwin Griggs, and a local chairman to be appointed by Irwin Griggs. The motion was seconded and carried.

20. With the idea of "warm-up" publicity for the Philadelphia meeting it was suggested that lists of high school and college teachers of the area be obtained through Brice Harris. The activities of the Membership Committee will be headed by Richard Beal with the help of Frank Bowman.

21. George Kelly being absent, there was no report from the committee on economic basis of Freshman English.

22. It was moved, seconded, and carried that the temporary member of the NCTE College Section Committee remain in office until such time as an officer can be elected under the amendment not yet passed.

23. With reference to Sheet B of the agenda listing eleven recommendations to be considered by the Executive Committee, Mr. Tuttle moved that a committee on committees be appointed to study and make recommendations as to how such problems referred to the Executive Committee should be handled. The motion was seconded and carried.

Frank Bowman moved that a second committee of three be appointed by the Chair and that this committee report periodically to the Chair, and to the Executive Committee at the March meeting, concerning what is under way and contemplated in regard to the status of the profession by the MLA and other organizations. The motion was seconded and carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 12 midnight.

Secretary's Report No. 18

The November 1956 Luncheon Meeting was held in the Crystal Room of the Sheraton-Jefferson Hotel, St. Louis, at 12:15 on Friday, the twenty-third, Chairman Irwin Griggs presiding. Mr. Griggs introduced the officers and guests at the speakers table and greeted the CCCC members, and guests numbering about two hundred.

After speaking briefly on the phenomenal growth of CCCC and on some of the main recent activities of the Executive Committee, he pointed out that this year's election was the first under the new system which allows CCCC members to choose from a slate of nominees for the Executive Committee. He complimented the Nominating Committee on the excellent list of nominees which resulted in extremely close margins for the winners.

Chairman Griggs introduced Gladys Brown, Secretary of CCCC, who announced the following as elected with terms of office to begin in approximately thirty days:

Officers

Chairman: Francis Shoemaker, Teachers College, Columbia University

Associate Chairman: Robert E. Tuttle, General Motors Institute

Assistant Chairman: Albert R. Kitzhaber, University of Kansas

Secretary: Joseph A. Rogers, St. Louis University

Executive Committee

Universities

Francis Christensen, University of Southern California

Sumner A. Ives, Tulane University

Dorothy Moulton, Bowling Green (Ohio) State University

Liberal Arts Colleges

T. J. Kallsen, Stephen F. Austin (Texas) State College

Walther Prausnitz, Concordia College (Minnesota)

Teachers Colleges

H. W. Reninger, Iowa State Teachers College, Cedar Falls

Rhodes R. Stanley, Indiana (Pa.) State Teachers College

Technical Schools

H. Alan Wycherley, U. S. Naval Academy

Members NCTE Board of Directors

Margaret M. Bryant, Brooklyn College

Richard S. Beal, Boston University

Margaret D. Blickle, Ohio State University

Following the election report, Chairman Griggs presented Thomas B. Sherman, music and drama critic for the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*. Mr. Sherman delighted the audience with his address on "The Writer as Craftsman."

CCCC Bulletin Board

The College Section of NCTE will hold a luncheon during the MLA meetings in Madison, Wisconsin, on *September 10*, at 12:30. See the MLA program for the place. NCTE Secretary Hook will speak on "The English Teacher: Leader or Critic?"

Professor Anne McGurk has accepted official responsibility for carrying news

back and forth between CCCC and NSSC, The National Society for the Study of Communication, its journal *The Journal of Communication*, Editor, C. Merton Babcock. Professor McGurk has been performing the service unofficially for some time. Her first official report to CCCC follows:

The Spring Issue of *The Journal of Communication* contains several articles which might be of interest to CCCC members.

In "The Problem of Verifiability" by Ralph Renwick, Jr., of Michigan State University, the author criticizes the oversimplification of many terms used in report writing. He states that communication teachers need to explore with their students the problem of "verifiability," by raising such thought-provoking questions as: What does "responsible communication" mean? Can there be two instances of communication which contradict each other but which are equally responsible? The author states that teachers will fulfill their functions in the field of general education only if they avoid stopping at the half-truths of such phrases as "socially pooled knowledge" and "greatest general usefulness."

In "Factors of Readability in Compositions Written by Students of Low Ability," Robert L. Wright of Michigan State University concludes in part:

In summation, the data in the study described indicated the most significant difference (at the one percent level), between better and poorer papers written by the same student was one of sentence length . . . Better papers generally contained fewer sentences than did poor papers . . . Certainly instructors may with profit give more emphasis in the classroom to connectives, parenthetical elements, and similar concepts; one wonders, however, if a greater good would not result from a conscientious attempt to treat serious, significant subjects with care and understanding.

"Colonel Blunderbuss' Battle Cry" by Lt. John B. Haney of the Air Command and Staff College of Maxwell Air Force Base is an amusing article concerning the advantages of clear, simple English versus militarese. It contains many humorous examples that might be used for class illustration.

Norton B. Crowell, Acting Chairman of the Department of English at the University of New Mexico, reports that Hoyt Trowbridge of the University of Oregon has been appointed Chairman at New Mexico, his duties to begin in September.

The Developmental Reading Staff of the Purdue Department of English announces Volume 1, Number 1 of the *Journal of Developmental Reading*, a quarterly, subscriptions \$3.50 a year (\$3.00 to teachers). Lively, provocative articles, 1500-5000 words long, will be welcomed by the Staff; any aspect of developmental reading may be discussed, in high school, college, or adult education.

At the Conference in Chicago Harold B. Allen circulated notices of a sectional meeting on the dictionary during the NCTE convention at Minneapolis. Representatives of various companies will be given an opportunity to speak of some of the problems of putting a dictionary together. Mr. Allen called for questions on dictionary-making that members would like to hear discussed. Your suggestions will reach him at the Department of English, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis 14, preferably at once.

The Graduate Assistant Program at Duquesne University

SAMUEL J. HAZO¹

At a time when the number of teachers seems inadequate to handle increasing student enrollments, when the average class load of many teachers of composition and literature ranges from

twelve to fifteen hours of classes per week, when responsible and clairvoyant members of one panel at the CCCC meeting in New York in 1956 even suggested the expedient solution of hiring degree-holding housewives to help com-

¹Duquesne University

position teachers correct student themes², Duquesne University has sought to meet the problems imposed by increased student enrollment by judiciously implementing an in-service teaching program for graduate assistants.

The program resembles in purpose many of those which have been described in past issues of the CCCC bulletin, but it differs in method. This difference in method is based upon the sequence of the Master's program itself. Since Duquesne does not yet offer the doctorate in English, we are able to give the Master's program our complete attention as an end in itself rather than as a mere stepping stone toward a Ph.D. The graduate assistant program, therefore, has been established on a four-semester or two-year basis with the assistant's being required to register for three graduate courses of two-semester credits each in all four semesters.

All graduate assistants are required to teach two Freshman Composition sections in addition to their regular program of graduate study during their first year of residence. Each semester during this first year, therefore, is equally divided between six hours of teaching and six hours of graduate course work. Also during the first year the assistant must register for English 620 and 621 (*The Teaching of College English*). This course is required for all assistants and carries a credit of one hour per semester for two semesters.

English 620 and its sequel, English 621, are both intended to be auxiliary courses. They are both lecture and seminar and are supervised by the Director of Freshman English.

The purpose of English 620 is the consideration of those problems that a beginning teacher of English might encounter in the first semester of a course

in Freshman Composition. Some of the problems considered are related to the teaching of dictionary usage, the correction of student themes, the particular and failing errors in freshman writing, the tendency of students to "re-tell" rather than criticize a novel to meet a book report assignment, the numerous pit-falls of the research paper, the forms of the freshman examination. Twice during this first semester, classes of the graduate assistants are visited by representatives of an evaluating committee, of which the Chairman of the English Department and the Director of Freshman English are members. These visitations, which are remedial rather than purely evaluative, are pre-arranged unless the graduate assistant prefers unannounced visitation; the assistants are encouraged also to visit one another's classes. The major written requirement of the course is the preparation of a research paper analyzing any pivotal problem related to the teaching of Freshman Composition. These papers are read by the assistant before an evaluating committee at the conclusion of the semester.

No specific text has yet been chosen for English 620 but included in the bibliography are such works as *Modern Rhetoric* and *Fundamentals of Good Writing* by Brooks and Warren, the recently published *Guide to American English* by L. M. Myers, *Understanding Grammar* by Paul Roberts, and supplementary essays from *College English*, *College Composition and Communication*, and the *Journal of English Education*.

The purpose of English 621, the sequel to English 620, is the consideration of those problems that the beginning teacher might encounter in teaching advanced composition as well as the essay, the short story, the novel, poetry and the drama in introduction - to - literature courses or in literature surveys. The subject matter of each class meeting of Eng-

²For more information see "Unprecedentedly Large Classes: Exploratory Solutions," *College Composition and Communication*, October, 1956 pp. 167-169.

lish 621 is synchronized as closely as possible to the syllabus for the second semester of the Freshman Composition course (English 102) at Duquesne. Since the second semester of Freshman Composition combines instruction in advanced composition with introduction-to-literature lectures and discussions, the graduate assistant is able to bring to the various English 621 seminars a knowledge derived from actual practice in teaching advanced composition and the five basic literary forms. Class visitation is also part of English 621, and graduate assistants are required to prepare research papers analyzing any problem related to the actual teaching of literature and to read and defend the paper before an evaluating committee.

Since the graduate assistant may and probably will be required to teach literature after acquiring his graduate degree, English 621 has a secondary purpose: to act as a transition and preparation for his second year of graduate study as well as his eventual goal of a full-time instructorship. The assistantship program during this second year of study resembles the first year in all phases but one. (Courses similar to English 620 and 621 are not offered in the second year, but the Director of Freshman English is available for consultation with graduate assistants at all times). The student is required to register for the usual six hours of graduate study at the beginning of his third se-

mester or second year. However, his teaching assignment during this second year, though remaining standard at six hours, is divided equally between one course in Freshman Composition and one course of a sophomore literature survey. This sequence is continued during his fourth and final semester. The graduate assistant is thus able to teach literature at a time when consultation is available to him, and the problems previously considered in English 621 are those which the assistant might logically expect to meet not only in teaching the sophomore literature survey but also as a prospective teacher of literature.

We believe that English 620 and 621 are designed to meet needs of which the graduate assistant himself may be unaware and are, therefore, beneficial correlates to the assistant's teaching at a vital and formative stage of his teaching experience. Assistants at Duquesne have already admitted that the discussion of a problem before actually encountering it in a teaching situation has helped them avoid many a Scylla and Charybdis in their classes.

Although the final test of the graduate assistant program at Duquesne is whether or not it helps young men to be better teachers at a time when more and better teachers are desperately needed, we think that English 620 and 621 can be of aid to the sincere and intelligent aspirants to that goal.

Staff Room Interchange

The Meaning of "Stereotype"

Faced with the problem of demonstrating to a class in Communication the meaning of the word "stereotype" as well as the significance of this shallow form of thinking in mass communication today, I thought of using the dramatic skit.

In class I explained the skit technique: First, a scenario is arrived at by common agreement through discussion, with a simple plot based on the usual stereotyped features of TV programs. Next the students decide upon their own parti-

cipation, what character they will assume and what are some of the points of characterization. Then the group runs through the skit, adding sample dialogue and blocking or action as they go. After doing this once or, at the most, twice, they are ready to perform.

Having discussed the process of putting on a skit, the students were given ten minutes of class period for a discussion and decision as to possible topics (to avoid duplication of subject matter). This was done in their small groups of three or four students. They also made arrangements at this time for a brief rehearsal period. Skits must be spontaneous in order to be entertaining as in order to drive home the basic idea, so only a day or two was allowed to elapse between the assignment and the presentation. This short time span also avoids building up a dread at facing the class.

The skits turned out to be hilarious, as might be expected, particularly the

quiz show with the moronic contestant, the ham quizmaster, and the curvaceous hostess. The cooking school expert, with her false good humor while everything went wrong, was outstanding, and the children's western brought down the house, in more ways than one.

There were several values gained from the use of the dramatic skit form. It helped break down the reserve of some of the class members who came from widely varying fields in the university. In addition to developing a stronger group feeling, the skits sharpened the students' awareness of the stereotype, in its many aspects, vocal and facial expressions, typical postures, standardized language and general style and presentation of the script. There are undoubtedly other areas of communication which could be presented in this manner, although the TV stereotype is particularly adaptable.

JOSEPHINE PATEREK

University of Minnesota

Some of the Year's Work in College Composition and Communication

Sheridan Baker, Instructor in English at the University of Michigan, continues in the *AAUP Bulletin*, Autumn 1956, the apparently hopeless attack upon persistent stylistic flaws in sentences professors write. Considering his function as editor of *The Papers of the Michigan Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters* Mr. Baker illustrates with remarkable restraint the academic addiction to nouns, the passive voice, and an ornate vocabulary.

He finds *Spanish-type (Spanish), in size (long), of a peculiar order (peculiar), of an indefinite nature (indefinite), of great importance (important) and body consciousness, human body function, significance level, art ability,*

nature-nurture evidence. A few of his examples of the endemic, evasive passive are "Public concern *has also been given* a tremendous impetus *by* the findings . . .," "Many of the remedies *would probably be shown to be* 'faith cures'," "In this way less developed countries *can be enabled to participate in* . . ." Mr. Baker is tolerant of technical terms, but a passage like the following nets fish of another order: "Of the many things which influence angling success, the size of population of the species sought must be a prime factor. In order to gain information on the relationship between population and yield to fishermen in a fishery based mainly on large mouth bass, *Micropterus salmoides* (Lacepede), we have experimented . . ."

"I done mine," she said. I glared at her. "I beg your pardon?" "I done mine," she repeated. She paused for a moment, thoughtfully, then blushed. "I mean—I have done mine." The student was the one student in five classes of high school seniors and juniors who had just scored 98 on a good objective test in grammar. The teacher is Charles H. Wilson, author of *A Teacher Is a Person* (Henry Holt and Company, 1956), who had himself scored 89 on the same test.

Elsewhere in this lively autobiography and defense of public schools, the Superintendent of Schools in Highland Park, Illinois, has a word or two for Arthur Bestor and other critics of like mind. As evidence that public schools have never produced the quality some expected of them, Mr. Wilson quotes a report on the Boston schools in 1845: "It is difficult to believe that, in the Boston Schools, there should be so many . . . [senior-class] errors in spelling, in grammar, and in punctuation . . . [The tests] show beyond all doubt, that a large proportion of the scholars of our first classes, boys and girls of fourteen and fifteen years of age, when called upon to write simple sentences, to express their thoughts on common subjects, without the aid of a dictionary or a master, cannot write, without such errors in grammar, in spelling, and in punctuation, as we should blush to see in a letter from a son or daughter of their age."

Professors in liberal arts colleges, Mr. Wilson declares, are in a vulnerable position from which to condemn public education and "educationists." "Since I started to teach twenty years ago, I have not once seen a liberal arts professor in a school except by invitation. I have not known one liberal arts professor to attend a superintendents' round table or teachers' meeting. You can count on one hand the number of liberal arts professors who attend the magnificent meet-

ing of school administrators held each year at Atlantic City."

In a critical report, in the *CEA Critic*, May, 1956, on the Eleventh National Conference on Higher Education in Chicago, March 1956, Donald Lloyd censures the more extravagant aims of communication courses as such courses were described at the Conference. The impression he gathered there of communication was "all glowing plans and prospectuses, high and hazy ideals, and meager results." As evidence that his impression cannot be charged entirely to bias, Lloyd says of the conventional course that "we have failed, as a group of scholar-teachers, to bring to the freshman course the fullness of our scholarship and the primacy of our concern; I think that we leave our young teachers contemptuous of this work which they will have to do for many years, and all too aware of our own contempt for it."

Do you, or are you about to, offer an introductory course in mass communication? Comfort and help in either case will be found in Richard Braddock's (Communication Skills, State University of Iowa, Iowa City) article on such a course in *The Journal of Communication*, Summer, 1956, pp. 56-62. Admitting the breadth of subject matter, the unlikelihood that any instructor will be fully prepared to teach this course, and the lack of suitable texts, Mr. Braddock proceeds to outline his course in considerable detail. The skeleton plan of the course follows: 1. Nature and significance of mass communication—four days; 2. formation of opinion through advertising, public relations, education—four days; 3. magazines—six days; 4. newspapers—eight days; 5. radio—eight toward a free and responsible use of days; 6. motion pictures—eight days; 7.

mass media—four days; 8. implication of the mass media for education—four days. Numerous materials other than an inclusive text are listed.

John Mitchell's article "Engineers Need Not Be Writers," in the *CEA Critic*, February, 1956, and reported in *CCC*, May, 1956, brought several replies, reported in the *CEA Critic* for May, 1956. C. A. Brown of the General Motors Institute called attention to an article he and Ralph A. Richardson contributed to *General Motors Engineering*, September-October, 1955. The article affirms the engineer's need for his own skill in writing and the necessary effectiveness of teaching composition and report-writing. Vernon P. Helming, University of Massachusetts, observes that the graduate engineer for his first five years or so on the job could well have someone else write his reports for him. Thereafter, however, if he rises in the profession, launches into new areas of design and technique, and assumes the multifarious contacts of an executive, he will outdistance the technical writing assistant. This advanced engineer will need his own mastery of the various skills of communication.

Although a much smaller percentage of British school-age children than American children complete secondary school and enter college, evidence crosses the Atlantic that complaints of British teachers of English about deficiencies in English composition are exactly like our own. A spate of letters published in the *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, August 25-September 1, 1955, responded to expressed concern of a committee on university entrance requirements at "the low standard of use and understanding of English among some university entrants." Mr. Ralph W. V. Elliott, Department of Eng-

lish, University College of North Staffordshire, vigorously concurred on the basis of having read over two thousand essays roughly equivalent to our CEEB examination. Even within his college, composition on final honors papers is found so deficient that the *introduction* of a freshman course in composition is being discussed. Mr. Elliott blamed poor teaching of spelling in primary schools, the decline of Latin, and poor reading habits.

School correspondents who replied blamed homes of low literacy, reading of "cheap weeklies, comics, or very childish fiction," and large classes. A London teacher writes: "mine have varied from 46 to over sixty . . . if only we had had a maximum of 30." None of them mentioned phonics nor complained of radio or television.

ETS Developments, the quarterly bulletin of the Educational Testing Service, for May 1956 briefly reports the response to a questionnaire sent out by John W. French and aimed to reveal how the inclusion of an essay test in College Board examinations would affect the teaching of writing in the schools. According to the replies (80% of the teachers addressed in 224 high schools) students today get "slightly more" writing practice than did students ten years ago, although "about one quarter of the schools give less composition work, mainly because of the heavy teaching load," and numerous short paragraphs tend to replace longer themes. The teachers strongly approved of inclusion of an essay test in the College Board program as motivation for high school writing. The Board, however, has found the test essay too difficult to evaluate to serve as an accurate measure of a student's competence in writing.

Alfred A. Schimmel, Head of the English Department, Baldwin High School, Baldwin, New York, in the spring of 1956 sent questionnaires to eighty colleges in which Baldwin graduates have recently enrolled to learn what these colleges thought of the preparation in English of Baldwin graduates and recent freshmen in general. Colleges covered, besides the expected New England colleges, included Purdue, both Michigan State and the University of Michigan, Oberlin, John Hopkins, and Duke. Sixty-four colleges responded, indicating commendable conscientiousness toward honest self-examination in the high school, and a willingness to help. Several extended Baldwin invitations to join English associations and conferences where such problems are regularly considered. A report of the replies will be submitted for possible publication to the *English Journal*.

In line with a current trend toward limited or controlled choice of topic for the research paper, A. Grove Day of the University of Hawaii presents, in the *CEA Critic* for November 1956, a suggestive list of topics bearing upon the course in which the paper is required: "American vs. British English; Bibliography, collecting a; Biography, the writing of; Business English; Dialect; Dictionaries; Euphemisms; Grammar, aspects of; History, the writing of; Idioms; International languages; Journalism and English; Latin and Greek roots in English; Legal language; Localisms; Logic and language; Neologisms; Pidgin and other jargons; Place names; Plagiarism; 'Poetic diction'; Propaganda; Proverbs; Radio language; Reference books for writers; Rumors; Semantics, aspects of; Slang; Spelling reform; Short story, history of American; 'Style books' for American usage; textbooks for English courses; 'War words' of the twentieth cen-

tury; 'Writing process' (Psychology of composition)."

The *Newsletter* of the Harvard Foundation for Advanced Study and Research, December 31, 1956, reports research by Visiting Professors Lloyd Homme (University of Pittsburgh) and Irving Saltzman (University of Indiana) on "teaching machines." With aid from the Fund for the Advancement of Education and from the Human Resources Research office of George Washington University, the two professors hope to develop techniques "that will reduce the teacher's routine work." The *Newsletter* also reports the presentation to Harvard University of Univac, which, among other functions, will "give new flexibility to research in language analysis and translation. To learn the rules for machine translation, scientists are analyzing and composing music, the simplest of language."

In "Effective Reading and Grade-Point Improvement," *School and Society*, April 4, 1956, D. S. Willey of New Mexico A. and M. and C. W. Thomson, San Jose State College, give results of their experiment with 96 freshmen in a course in remedial reading. Using 48 remedials and 48 other freshmen with the same type of content but without remedial work as controls, they found that the former did somewhat better than the latter. They feel that directors could save many weaker students by using such a course.

—F. J. W.

Abraham S. Goodhart, Brooklyn College, in *School and Society*, April 28, 1956, discusses the problem of freshmen in English composition. He finds that College Entrance requirements are out-

moded, and that high schools are not primarily college preparatory schools. There is need, he declares, for adjustment between the two groups so that high school graduates will do satisfactory work in freshman English. The adjustment can be brought about through conferences between instructors of the two groups. When the Federal School Aid programs are being arranged, he thinks that this problem must be considered.

—F. J. W.

Educational Screen and Audio Visual Guide for November 1956 contains Alfred H. Marks' "Grading Themes by Lantern Light." Through the use of a spotlight projector, a white chalk board that can be Marlite, and a Blaisdell glass marking pencil, he has had much success in marking freshman papers in class. He has completely graded 22 themes, averaging 200 words, in one class and has commented on them. This type of grading, he finds, is the "most realistic and fruitful approach to discussing English themes." The students like it.

—F. J. W.

As part of its 25th Anniversary issue, *The American Scholar*, Autumn, 1956, presents a list of the "most neglected books of the past 25 years" as selected by eminent scholars, writers, and critics." A few of the titles together with names of persons who proposed them follow: Elizabeth Madox Roberts, *The Time of Man*, 1926 (J. Donald Adams); Geoffrey Dennis, *The End of the World*, 1930 (Morris Bishop); Roderick Seidenberg, *Posthistoric Man, an Inquiry*, 1950 (Crane Brinton); John Burnet, *Essays and Addresses*, 1929 (David Daiches); Henry Roth, *Call It Sleep*, 1934; Nathaniel West, *A Cool Million*, 1934, John Peale Bishop, *Act of Darkness*, 1935 (Leslie A. Fiedler); Hermann Hesse, *Magister Ludi*, 1949 (Henry C. Hatfield); Raymond Pearl, *To Begin With: Being Prophylaxis Against Pedantry*, 1927 (Gerald W. Johnson); Martin Foss, *Symbol and Metaphor in Human Experience*, 1949 (Marianne Moore); Odd Nansen, *From Day to Day*, 1949 (Carl Sandburg); Czeslaw Milosz, *The Captive Mind*, 1953 (Ernest J. Simmons); Martin Schutze, *Academic Illusions in the Field of Letters and Arts*, 1933 (Lionel Trilling).

The Unprepared Student at Ripon College¹

P. J. ALDUS²

The problem of the unprepared student has been urgent at Ripon College as almost everywhere else. Ripon is a small liberal arts college not essentially different from such colleges throughout the land.

From 1948 to 1953 students weak in English fundamentals were placed in a one-semester review course without credit. It was not a very successful operation. Students labeled the course "dummy English" and were resentful of doing work for which no credit was given. Morale was very low.

From 1948 to 1953 the problem became more intensified because of greater numbers of students of this type. There were more sections, but classes remained large, averaging not less than twenty. At the same time, it was clear that the lower segment of the regular English group should really have discipline in fundamentals. The point of placement was, in realistic terms, too high.

The greater incidence of weak students left the department with three choices. The extant procedure with all its shortcomings might be continued; weak students could be placed in regular freshman English to survive or fall out; a new approach providing better teaching conditions could be devised in the hope of salvaging more of the unprepared.

The latter choice was made. This was not a matter of educational philosophy. It can better be described as an ethical-pragmatic decision. The students had been admitted into the college; the least we could do for them was to give them ideal conditions in which to learn what

they should have learned in high school. Moreover a new attack might have general value as an experiment.

In 1953 the department gained from the faculty permission to extend the remedial course. The faculty also approved, having found precedents in other colleges, the giving of "token" credit for the work. The course was scheduled for three hours per week for two semesters, and allowed two hours of credit per semester.

Placement procedures were adjusted to allow inclusion of more students. As many as 45% of entering students were required to do remedial work, for they needed it. In the present year the figure is down to about 30%.

The administration, recognizing the fundamental importance of English throughout the curriculum, agreed to increase the staff so that class load was reduced from fifteen to twelve hours per week. Each instructor teaches one section of sophomore literature, so the burden of paper work was reduced, and on the average, instructors had no more than sixty to seventy students in all.

A good deal of the released time was used for conference with weak students. Conferences were both more frequent and longer.

In the three years of the experiment almost every type of material has been used: exercise sheets for grammar drill; anthologies of readings of a not too difficult kind; disciplines in simple exposition, paragraphing, sentence construction and diction; class analysis of mimeographed student papers.

It became quickly apparent that one of the most difficult problems was grading. The work is on the high school level, but the grades are recorded for college

¹A paper presented in Panel VI, College Composition and Communication, March 23, 1957, Hotel Morrison, Chicago.

²Ripon College

work. Students who earn an A or B in remedial work can usually manage regular freshman composition at a C level, but those who get a C in remedial face a most difficult task to survive. Not infrequently the latter type of student, shocked at poor grades in regular composition, develops distress or animus at the shift in values.

In this Alice-in-Wonderland context it was decided that we should keep grades

low at the outset, make clear to students that grades during the year are "advisory," and that performance in the final examination for the second semester would be the chief criterion for passing or failing.

Given this ideal situation one might expect encouraging results. Following are the statistics for comparative attrition:

	(1 sem.; no credit) 1948-53	1953-56 (2 sem.; credit)	1948-56 (overall figures)
End of 1 semester	19%	15%	16%
End of 2 semesters	44%	47%	45%
End of 4 semesters	66%	61%	62%

It is obvious that there was no gain in retention of students. It is the feeling of the staff that, with a few exceptions, there is no appreciable gain in understanding or skill on the part of most students. It is the consensus of the staff (every member has taught the course, including the Dean of the Faculty) that, regardless of method, materials, class size, consultation time, the problem remains unsolved, baffling, frustrating.

If one seeks causes, perhaps it is the leveling by reason of great numbers in the high school population. But often we find that the I.Q. of these students is not particularly low, although there is a very close correlation between lack of ability in English and a generally poor

record of scholarship.

Perhaps it is difficulty in *unlearning*. Poor English may be fixed habit, a condition of mind. Possibly if teaching conditions in the lower schools were improved, and educational philosophy there were to allow competence in language training, the problem might be minimized.

There is firm agreement among the staff that colleges should not spend time teaching anything whatever on the high school level. In other words, we would prefer to meet the problem by refusing to have it. Our thinking now, as the experiment is well under way is in the direction of that at the University of Illinois.

THE STUDY OF ENGLISH IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

By W. C. Jackson, Principal, Greensboro High School

It is a difficult thing to determine the most important subject to be taught in the public school system, and I shall not now undertake to claim precedence for the subject of English. But I do think that a recent statement of a leading educator of North Carolina that "English is the neglected study in our schools," cannot be controverted. Teachers of English in our High Schools and Colleges who have had to deal with the products of the public schools first hand, have borne abundant and conclusive testimony as to the accuracy of this statement.

—from the September 1906 issue of North Carolina Journal of Education (reprinted in *North Carolina Education*, September, 1956)